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THE BRIC-A-BRAC DEALER.



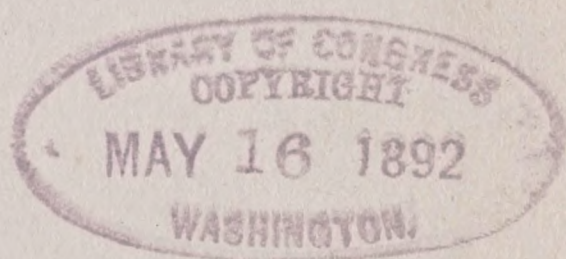
“Yes, he said cooly, this piece is of some value.”

Le catholique
THE

BRIC-A-BRAC DEALER

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

Bar E.
de Merville



20582X1

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

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THE BRIC-A-BRAC DEALER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIC-A-BRAC DEALER: HIS WARES AND HIS CUSTOMERS.

DURING that period of the Second Empire when the fever of demolition was still at its height in Paris, there stood in one of the little streets of the faubourg Saint Honoré a low and narrow building, the remnant of a former time. How different from our modern structures, so elegant, so neatly finished ! What a contrast between our present luxurious warerooms and the low, dingy shops which served their purpose in past generations !

No richly decorated plate-glass and show-cases were to be seen in front; nothing but a large window divided into many small panes of various colors.

By some chance or other gas had found its

way thither, but it seemed out of place under the low ceiling with its dark beams, and as no mirror reflected or multiplied its rays, there was never much light, either in daytime or at night, in that dingy, disordered place into which we beg to introduce our reader.

Do not imagine, however, that the old house presented a repulsive appearance: quite the contrary. The front was kept scrupulously clean and had been newly plastered; the shutters were freshly painted; the windows were ornamented with white curtains, their diminutive size being their only fault.

The dark alley-way which led to the house was always in perfect order and frequently sprinkled, lest its neat appearance should be compromised. An automatic bell at the lattice gate announced each arrival.

A coat-of-arms was the only index to luxury. A sign with gold letters over the front window of the first story read thus:

JEROME QUESNOY,
DEALER IN BRIC-A-BRAC.

Behind one of the lower panels of the window was a tablet which gave more information regarding the work done inside, thus:

Old Porcelain and *Faïence* Bought and Sold,
Exchanged and Repaired; Works of Art
of all Kinds, at Moderate Prices.

And to show the truth of the announcement there was in the window a collection of fencing-foils, old watches, bronzes, china vases, cut-glass, exquisite lace, old Palissy, and especially specimens of porcelain from all the nations that have excelled in this particular art.

Although humble in the eyes of those accustomed to the splendor of modern fashion, the little store presented an air of respectability quite captivating. It was the richest in that quarter, inhabited only by fruit-sellers, charcoal venders, wine-merchants, and dealers in bric-a-brac; there was so much idle and vulgar talk to be heard all around that the quiet and semi-obscure sanctuary of Papa Quesnoy was a place of "sweet repose."

M. Quesnoy had easily gained rank among the upper ten of the neighborhood, generally composed of merchants who did not own much property. Besides, that part of the faubourg was little frequented by what is termed "the fashionable world;" yet occasionally one might see stylish carriages standing for hours in

front of the humble dwelling of Papa Quesnoy. These always attracted the attention of the street-urchins and gossips, who would wonder what attractions could be found at the old man's store.

"Did you see the beautiful lady who called at Papa Quesnoy's?" asked the fruit woman of the charcoal seller at that hour of the evening when gossiping is particularly the fashion.

"What! another?"

"Was it not one of the regular visitors?" asked a third gossip who had overheard the news.

"No, not at all. She was much prettier than the rest; you should have seen her beautiful dress, and how she drew it together when passing through the little gate!"

"Yes, that's too narrow for such customers; he ought to get a building suitable for the 'beau monde.'"

"Papa Quesnoy go to any expense! He is too great a miser for that."

"And what do they want with him? He is certainly not handsome."

"And gentlemen, too! There came three to-day, and with decorations, too."

Thus for years the neighborhood had been

wondering why the old curiosity shop was honored with the visits of so many nabobs. This astonishment may be explained, however. Only an artist can understand the passion of some people for antiquities, and not everybody is an artist.

An antiquarian is a peculiar sort of an artist who, not being capable of producing great things himself, is satisfied with collecting the artistic productions of those who have gone before him, and thus renders important services to art. Papa Quesnoy was one of that class.

He flattered himself, and justly so, that he knew his business thoroughly, especially in regard to the ceramic art. He was not only a dealer, but a clever connoisseur and a passionate collector of the precious and delicate objects which made up his principal stock. No pains, no fatigue, was too much for him when there was question of increasing his knowledge of antiquities or of adding to his collection of curiosities. He often travelled a long distance only to admire some rare old object which he knew no amount of gold could purchase. But admiration is such a sweet enjoyment!

Let us enter the old shop and come to the pith of our narrative. On a cold, wet Decem-

ber evening we find Papa Quesnoy examining most carefully, both with his naked eyes and with a magnifying glass, some cracked cups and a teapot of antique shape, which he had bought that day at public auction. While he is absorbed in his examination let us freely look about the place.

The room honored with the name of warehouse measures scarcely fourteen square feet, but the quantity of merchandise which it contains is surprising. Not an inch of space has been lost. It is difficult to enter the store, and almost impossible to move safely between the piles of porcelain, *faïence*, cut-glass, and tables loaded with curiosities of all kinds. Along the walls there is a great assortment of plates, dishes, and saucers, some cracked or fractured, of common appearance or discolored by age; others, on the contrary, decorated with fresh paintings of landscapes, flowers, and other graceful subjects.

One thing, however, surprises those who are not imbued with the sacred fire; it is to see *ugly, inartistic* articles (Ah, Quesnoy, pardon the heresy expressed by these two words) occupy places of honor, thus showing that in old porcelain, as in other things, we must not judge by appearances.

But the sanctum contains something more than porcelain.

Leaning against the wall and loaded with a quantity of precious little objects of art are three large cabinets of sculptured oak to which time has given that peculiarly beautiful dark shade which is so highly valued by connoisseurs; we need not be artists to admire *that*; the furniture of our forefathers was really of matchless beauty. Old paintings, looking-glasses with fantastic frames, are standing against these cabinets; clocks of antique form decorate the mantel-piece; books of all sizes and of all styles are lying on the floor. What a wonderful heap, when we think that the best of so many authors lies there forgotten at our feet.

It looks as if the most perplexing disorder were to reign forever in that store. Yet there must be some method amidst this apparent confusion; the proof of it is that Jerome Quesnoy never experiences the least difficulty in finding what he wants.

The gossiping women are not wrong when they say that Quesnoy is not handsome. He is about sixty-five years of age, short and stout, with a large head well covered with a thick crop of woolly, grayish hair. His big

penetrating eyes, though somewhat veiled by glasses, have that intensely-concentrated expression which is peculiar to those who pursue but one object during their lifetime.

He is habitually gay, pleasant, and of easy access, and to-night he seems to be in a particularly good mood. While talking to himself, as old men will, he has just taken out of one of his bureau drawers a large book soiled by frequent use, and compares a mark almost blotted out which his penetrating eye has discovered in the bottom of a cup, with a similar mark reproduced on the page open before him.

"I was certain of it," he exclaimed, with an air of triumph; "it is old Dresden and the very best of it. No mistake about it. What a pity it is fractured! But a little mastic and a good touch of the brush will remedy that, and clever is he who shall notice it! Well, it was a good bargain after all."

Hark! What noise strikes his ear! Some one has timidly knocked at the outer door.

"Who is there?" he asked immediately, with surprise, for it was long past the time for customers. No answer. Yet he cannot be mistaken; he puts aside the cup which he held in his hand and goes to the door, which is vio-

lently beaten by wind and rain. He was right. A lady with a veil over her face and holding a little girl by one hand was standing on the door-sill.

"I have been told that you buy old porcelain, sir. Is that so?" asked the lady.

"Yes, madame, I do; but it must be worth buying," replied the merchant, with a sharp look of curiosity at his questioner. It was a young woman, tall and slender, with a pale and emaciated face. Her velvety eyes had a sort of feverish brightness common to the eyes of certain sick people. She wore a thin shawl, a hat trimmed with crape, and a widow's veil; the whole was faded and threadbare.

The unfortunate woman had evidently reached the last degree of misery. The old merchant, however, was not influenced by this sordid appearance, and instinctively he addressed the stranger as he was accustomed to address the grand ladies who came to make purchases at his store.

Despite her apparent poverty, it was not difficult to see at once by the purity of her accent, the dignity of her carriage, the elegance of her manners, that she belonged to good society; so true it is that a good education is more precious than wealth. We may lose the

one, the other will follow us through all the vicissitudes of life.

Papa Quesnoy, who had to deal with all sorts of people, had learned to distinguish at first sight a *real* lady from a *false* one; in the present case, as he said, "There is no mistake!"

"I have here some porcelain which I would like to dispose of," said the young widow, and took from the hands of her child a large leather satchel, evidently too heavy for such little arms, but which were better able to carry it than were those of the mother.

"Very well, madame; walk in, please," replied Quesnoy, drawing to one side to let the visitors pass. "Take care where you step; there is little room here, and your dress might do damage."

The lady followed the merchant while the little girl prudently remained at the entrance of the store, looking around with her big black eyes which had an expression of seriousness and anxiety much above her age.

"This, I believe, is real china," said the widow, taking from the satchel a large bowl of pale blue with designs of a darker shade.

"They call it so, but it is not china," answered Quesnoy, as he took the bowl and gave

it a few strokes with his knuckles to make sure that it was not cracked. "This is simply porcelain from India, and of a very common quality at that; it is not scarce; the market is overstocked with it."

"Then, monsieur, you are not inclined to buy it?" asked the young widow, while placing her trembling hand on the table for support.

"I did not say so, madame," replied Quesnoy, in a nasal and magisterial tone of voice which he affected on such occasions; "but I can only give you eight francs for it."

"Only eight francs!" repeated the stranger, with visible sadness.

"I cannot give more, madame," said the old merchant, shrugging his shoulders, "without being at a loss. But you have something else in your satchel? Let us see."

With her thin hand of almost transparent whiteness, the poor woman took from the satchel a plate of beautiful porcelain of blue and gold.

"I have three more like this one, which I shall bring you if you will buy them," she said.

The pretty plate was evidently not to the taste of the merchant of antiquities. An exclamation of contempt came from his lips.

"Well, no," he said, "I do not buy articles of that kind. This plate has no artistic value; it is not more than ten or twelve years old, and of very common material. If it was mine I would give it to my wife to use in her kitchen."

Strange idea! Although Jerome Quesnoy was not a bad husband, yet he could not deprecate a piece of porcelain in stronger terms than by saying that he would give it to his wife.

The widow seemed to be disheartened. She reluctantly took from her satchel the last article.

"This is very old, I know it," she said; "I have often been told that it is very valuable."

And she presented to the merchant a pitcher of a most curious shape. The merchant knew its value better than its owner, and though affecting indifference, in reality the antiquarian saw not only a bargain, but an actual prize. He examined the pitcher with the most careful scrutiny: it was old Sèvres of a very scarce pattern; on the interior rim and handle was painted a garland of roses interlaced with poppies; beneath, at regular intervals, there were butterflies, bees, and beetles. The neck of the pitcher represented a man's head with a long

beard and rosy cheeks and lips. But the principal beauty of the pitcher consisted in three exquisite paintings which decorated its exterior. They represented rural subjects.

The first showed a group of cows grazing in a verdant meadow, and two milkmaids in coquettish costumes. One of these had a milk-pail on her head; the other was being helped to lift a pail by a young peasant with long hair, dressed "*à la marquis*." On the second painting the cows were lying in the grass, and one of the milkmaids, leaning against the trunk of a tree, with two milk-pails at her feet, was conversing with a young shepherd attired in rose-clear-and-apple-green. The third painting represented the same maiden milking a cow, while the shepherd-boy, seated under a tree, charmed her ears with the sweet sounds of his flute.

It was graceful, poetical, effeminate in the extreme, Watteau all over.

Jerome Quesnoy did not give much attention to those details which are only interesting to the eyes of the common people. He had cast a rapid glance over the pretty paintings and assured himself by sight and by touch that the porcelain had neither flaw nor crack. The pitcher was perfect; but what made it more

attractive to the eye of a connoisseur like Quesnoy was a well-known mark, the indisputable sign of a genuine piece of Sèvres.

Yet Quesnoy was too much of a business man to show what he felt in the presence of this object of art. He was eager to acquire it, but it was impossible to show more self-possession than he did.

"Yes," he said, coolly, "this piece is of some value. May I ask, madame, what price has been set on it?"

"Oh, I do not know," answered the lady; "I had never thought of selling it, as it is an old family souvenir dear to me; but as I have now decided to sell it, I naturally would like to get a good price for it. Besides it is really beautiful, you must confess."

"Beautiful as much as you please," said the cunning rogue; "it is not enough for an article to be beautiful. Do you see that one, madame?" he added, pointing to a little ewer of simple form and tarnished color. "You would not believe it, judging by its appearance, but I expect to get nine louis for it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the widow, in surprise. "And why is that?"

"It is Venetian *faïence*, madame, genuine old Venetian, with the mark of the factory

which everybody can see; this is one of the rarest pieces, unique, perhaps."

"But this pitcher," interrupted the stranger, anxious to come to terms, "what do you think of it?"

"It is a piece of Sèvres, madame, and as it is neither cracked nor fractured, I will give you twenty francs for it."

"Not more?" said the stranger greatly disappointed, for the value set upon the ewer by Quesnoy had given her hope of a much higher offer.

"Yes, twenty francs," repeated the merchant, "and eight for the bowl, and if you wish to get rid of your plates of blue and gold, I am willing to give you the round sum of thirty francs for the whole. You see that I am reasonable, and if I take the plates, madame, it is only to oblige you, for it is my rule never to buy modern porcelain; it is not in my line of business."

The young woman seemed to be lost in painful meditation; after some hesitation she said with a deep sigh: "Well, then, as there is no alternative, I must accept your offer."

Jerome Quesnoy did not hesitate a moment. Putting his hand into a large pocket he drew out a small leather bag from which he took a

gold piece and ten francs in change and handed it to the lady.

"Do you keep back the price of the plates?" she asked, without touching the money, "or do you pay for them in advance?"

"It matters little, madame," said the old merchant. "I have confidence in you; send them at your convenience. I know when I am dealing with honest people."

"You are very kind, sir," replied the poor woman, with a feeble voice. "My little girl will bring them to-morrow morning. We do not live far from here."

Till then, Quesnoy had scarcely noticed the child standing at the door immovable like a statue; now he turned to her. The old merchant was not easily moved to sympathy, yet in this case he could not but feel a sudden and singular emotion when he met the serious face of the child and saw two big tear-drops tremble on her eyelids.

The little girl could not help weeping; she could not be reconciled to the separation from her dear pitcher; she loved it as one loves a dear old friend: it seemed to be part of her existence. As long as she could remember she had admired its paintings and listened with pleasure to the stories of the pretty milk-

maids and the cows as told by her mother who always added some new charm to the unchanging subject.

The little girl had nothing in common with the ill-bred children whom old Quesnoy saw daily in the street. Her face was very pale; her delicate features had a melancholy, care-worn expression uncommon to her age; her dress, like that of her mother, was threadbare but remarkably clean; there was in her little person an air of distinction, an innate gracefulness which her costume brought out to still better advantage.

All this was taken in at a glance by Jerome Quesnoy, and, strange to say, he felt ill at ease.

It seemed to him as if those big black eyes fixedly centred on him, were reading his innermost thoughts, and that the child understood that he had taken advantage of the inexperience and the want of her mother. Involuntarily he turned away his face as if struck by fear of seeing his evil deed unveiled.

It was the first time that a "lucky stroke," as the old merchant used to call such bargains, excited scruples and reproach of conscience. Ever since he was in business his maxim had been to buy as cheap as possible and to sell at

the highest obtainable price. Why then did he turn away his head like a criminal at the frank and candid look of that child?

"Come, Marguerite," said the lady to her little girl, giving her the empty bag, "we must return home."

The poor woman had made only a few steps when a violent fit of coughing obliged her to halt; she coughed so violently that, out of breath and exhausted, she had to lean against the partition of the corridor.

"O mamma, poor mamma!" screamed little Marguerite, taking her mother's hand with real anxiety. Then, turning to M. Quesnoy, she fixed on him a suppliant look.

"I will fetch a glass of water," said the old merchant, all confused. "The poor lady! it is pitiable to see her cough so." And he directed his steps toward the interior of the house.

"Thank you, sir; I need nothing, I feel better," whispered the widow, extending her hand to keep him back. "I am sorry to have alarmed you; it is nothing serious. I am accustomed to such attacks."

"Poor mamma! She is so sick and has eaten nothing all day!" exclaimed Marguerite sadly, and with the confiding simplicity of a child.

"Come, my child, let us go at once," said the young mother, in a quick tone. "Thank you, sir, for your kindness." And they left the shop.

We have said the evening was damp and dark; the rain had ceased, but the icy blast which penetrated through the open door chilled old Quesnoy.

"Poor creature! She ought not to be out in such weather," murmured the old man, while barring the door of the house, quite certain that no more visitors would come that evening.

His wife was in the store.

"Who is coming?" she asked eagerly. "Who in the world has such a cough?"

"It is a poor lady from whom I have bought some porcelain," he answered.

"She must be very sick," continued Mme. Quesnoy. "I do not like to hear such a cough; I call that a graveyard cough. And what did you buy from her?"

"A fine piece, indeed!" replied the merchant.

"Let us see what it is," said the wife, advancing toward the counter.

Mme. Dorothea Quesnoy had nothing of the artistic taste of her husband. She took interest in the business only because it was a means

of making money. In her opinion, modern porcelain was far preferable to all that old cracked china which Quesnoy took so much pains to fix up.

Nevertheless, she could not restrain her admiration when seeing the new acquisition. "Ah," she exclaimed, taking the pitcher in her hands to examine it more closely, "this is really beautiful! How much did you give for it?"

"Twenty francs."

"And at what price do you think of selling it?"

"For five or six louis, not less."

"Is it possible!" she exclaimed, with delight. "Well, you have had good luck to-day; and this bowl, did you buy it also?"

"Yes, but I do not make much of it. I have also bought this plate and three more which will be sent. I do not see why I bother myself with such rubbish."

"Rubbish! You are difficult to please; I find this plate most beautiful," said Mme. Quesnoy. "When are the others to be delivered?"

"The little girl will bring them to-morrow morning," he answered distractedly.

"What little girl?" inquired Dorothea.

"You have not been foolish enough, I hope, to pay for plates not yet in your possession. I would not know you, if you did."

"Certainly I did pay for them," retorted Quesnoy, with some humor, "and, moreover, I do not believe that I have acted foolishly in doing so. I know what I am doing. The lady is a person of quality who will keep her word, I know. And even if she did not, I have made enough profit on the pitcher to stand such a loss."

"Well, you may run the risk, if you like; I admire your confidence," said his wife sarcastically. Then, returning to the object of admiration, she added in a tone of conviction:

"You may be proud of that bargain. I congratulate you."

But Jerome Quesnoy did not seem to be quite as enchanted with his bargain. And yet, the more he examined the pitcher, the more he admired it, the more beautiful he found it. Why, then, turning and returning it in every direction, did he regret having purchased it, or, at least, not to have paid more for it? It was the thought of the little stranger that caused his regret—yes, remorse. Her sad, touching look, which seemed to implore his compassion, pursued him. He thought of

the innocent, ingenuous words which she had spoken. Why had her mother not eaten a morsel all day? Was she compelled to sell her porcelain in order to get money for bread? It looked like it. A sorrowful mystery seemed to be concealed in this whole affair. And at the thought of having taken advantage of the cruel situation of the unfortunate lady to obtain the pitcher at a mean price, the old merchant felt a blush of shame creeping over his face.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH OF M. QUESNOY'S VISITOR.

AFTER leaving the store of the antiquarian, the widow and her little girl went slowly up the long street of the *faubourg*. Marguerite held her mother's hand, not so much for her own protection as for the sake of her mother, whose steps were unsteady from weakness.

"The old gentleman is an honest man, is he not, mamma?" she asked, as if she was reproducing in her thoughts the scene which she had witnessed.

"I hope so, darling," answered the mother with a sigh of fatigue. "I trust he has acted conscientiously with me, for I am too poor to lose one cent of our meagre means. I thought, though, that it was worth more than he has given."

"What will he do with the pitcher, mamma?" continued Marguerite.

"He will sell it, I suppose."

"And will he give you the money?" asked the little girl, artlessly.

A melancholy smile appeared on the pale countenance of the widow.

"Ah, no! my child," she answered; "the gentleman has paid me; he owes me nothing more."

"And did he give you much money, mamma? Can you now buy sweetmeats as you used to do?"

"Ah, no, darling," replied the mother sadly. "I cannot give you sweetmeats. I shall be happy if I can buy bread for a week or two, till my strength comes back. May God grant that I shall soon be able to work!"

Marguerite seemed to be quite disappointed. She had hoped that the happy days which she had known during her father's lifetime would return,

But after a few moments she looked up and said bravely:

“Well, I do not care! I can very well do without sweets; and God will take care of us, will He not, mamma?”

The deeply-affected mother asked herself if there was in the whole world another child of eight years that would have endured with so much courage the hard privations imposed by cruel necessity.

“My darling,” she said, pressing with more tenderness the little hand which was concealed in her own, “you are my consolation and my joy; yes, I trust only in God, who is more merciful than men are; never yet has He entirely forsaken us. I should perhaps not say it, and yet my heart is so sad to-night, so sad.”

They were just then before a beautiful bakery, and to Marguerite’s greatest satisfaction, her mother entered.

It was high time, for since she had mentioned sweetmeats, it seemed to the poor child that she felt the pangs of hunger more keenly. Her mother bought one of the nice looking rolls in the show-window and then she also ventured to ask for a cup of milk.

“We do not sell milk, madame,” answered

the baker politely, "but I have some to spare which I will bring you with pleasure."

Before eating her roll, which she already devoured with her eyes, Marguerite said in a low and suppliant tone to her mother:

"Eat some of it, mamma, please."

"Yes, darling," answered the mother, "I will try to please you."

Having taken a morsel of the roll she dipped it in the milk, but she could scarcely swallow it.

"You seem to be suffering, madame," said the baker in a tone of sympathy. "Have you been sick?"

"Yes, very long," answered the widow; "but I am getting better. I do not feel so weak this evening."

When Marguerite had done away with the last crumb of the little roll her mother gave her the rest of the milk to drink; and paid for the whole with one of the pieces of money which M. Quesnoy had given her; then she rose to continue her journey. The short rest in the bakery and the little nourishment she had taken seemed to give her new strength. She walked more rapidly, and with more firmness.

"I thought we were returning home, mam-

ma," the little girl said, when she saw the direction they were taking.

"Not yet," answered the mother. And they continued their way through the interminable *faubourg*. At last they arrived at a large square, on the opposite side of which there opened a large street which seemed to be much frequented. The stores were brilliantly illuminated, particularly those of the confectioners and toy-dealers. Marguerite looked into the show-windows with envious eyes, yet without asking her mother to stop, as she feared very much to cause her pain.

After having crossed a boulevard traversed in every direction by carriages and omnibuses, they reached an avenue bordered with beautiful trees, and showing on both sides sumptuous hotels and elegant dwellings. This avenue was as quiet as the boulevard they had just left was noisy.

"Oh, I know where we are going, mamma: to the Champs-Élysées or to Passy!" exclaimed Marguerite, remembering that once she had taken that route to go to the Muette.

Her mother, unable to speak, gave a negative sign with her head. The poor woman had enough to do to fight against the wind which was blowing impetuously in her face and

chilled her to the very marrow of her bones. Passing by a street-lamp, Marguerite noticed that the face of her mother, generally pale, was highly colored, and that her eyes had a brilliancy and vivacity altogether new. "How fortunate," she thought. "Mamma must be better; she has such a beautiful color and we have not taken such a walk for a long time. It is a pity that the weather is so inclement."

They were at the end of the avenue when the widow slackened her steps, and at last stopped before a large and magnificent dwelling.

Something seemed to be going on in the house that evening. The façade was brilliantly lit up, and through the windows many people could be seen promenading in the spacious and richly-decorated salons. As the widow was standing on the sidewalk, out of breath, leaning against the gilt bars of the front gate, the captivating strains of a waltz played by an orchestra reached her ears.

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed the little girl, quite enchanted. But the effect produced on her mother was very different. She trembled all over and sighed heavily. She had come with the intention of knocking at that door and of speaking to the master of the

house, but she had to desist, as he was giving a soirée. She could not take him away from his guests, and, besides, she thought that in doing so she would run the risk of being recognized by some of the company. This danger, though, was merely imaginary, as sorrow and privation had altered her features beyond recognition. Poor woman! her heart failed her; she had made such a sacrifice and all her efforts were fruitless; courage failed her to ask for that interview which she desired so ardently to obtain. And to-morrow it will, perhaps, be too late. She trembled at this thought and sighed more sorrowfully than before.

“Mamma! Mamma! What ails you?” cried Marguerite. “Are you sick? Why do you stay here?”

But the mother made no answer, she scarcely heard the child; her mind was somewhere else. She dreamed of the past, of those days of gayety and prosperity when she also was dancing in these same salons; when she also was as happy, as brilliant, and as much admired as the young ladies who now were whirling to the strains of the waltz. But that time was long past. How many sufferings, how many tears, since then! The contrast was indeed very bitter.

"Mamma," repeated Marguerite, "will you not return home? It is so cold here." This complaint had its immediate effect.

The mother, indifferent to her own sufferings, was afraid to keep her little girl exposed longer to the icy wind which seemed every moment to increase in force. She took the little hand tendered her, and started to go, but she had scarcely made a few steps when a new fit of coughing obliged her to stop. Feeble, trembling, and breathless, she had to lean once more against the railing.

"Allow me to give you some advice, madame," said a kind voice behind her. "With such a cough you should not go out at night, and especially in this kind of weather."

The person who thus addressed her was a young man of distinguished manners, well enveloped in a large overcoat. He was evidently a guest invited to the *soirée*, perhaps a physician who, as such, considered himself authorized to give this friendly advice to the sick woman.

"Thank you, sir, I will hasten home," stammered the young woman, and she retreated with her child.

The brilliant light of a gas-jet fell on her emaciated countenance. The stranger looked

at her with the scrutinizing eye of an experienced practitioner, and shrugging his shoulders with a gesture of pity, he said to himself: "Poor creature, she is lost!"

Marguerite's mother had a vague consciousness of this sad truth, but she repelled with all her might this mournful presentiment. For the sake of her child she clung to life, painful as it was to herself, and she hoped against hope. In spite of her confidence in God, she could not bear the idea of leaving her little girl, the last joy of her life. What, indeed, would become of Marguerite, cast alone at such an age on a pitiless world?

For a long time, during the long hours of her wakeful nights, this question had pressed like a heavy weight on the heart of the poor mother. Her apprehensions grew more vivid, as she felt her weakness increase; at last she had conquered her pride for the love of her child; she had resolved to make a supreme appeal to the one who had sworn an oath never to forgive her.

And now that plan which had cost her so much physical suffering and so much mental anxiety, that plan, as we have seen, has failed.

"I shall return to-morrow," she thought.

"Cost what it may, for the love of my child I shall make another attempt."

But she had to return to the faubourg.

To the nervous excitement which had sustained the patient on her way to the avenue, there had succeeded a complete prostration at which she herself became alarmed. Not only had all strength left her, but the cough, which had become more irritating, kept up shaking her feeble and exhausted frame.

At last she arrived at the faubourg.

It was late in the evening when Marguerite and her mother passed the house of Quesnoy, and reached the dark little street where they had their lodging. The boarding-house, of which they occupied the top floor, stood on the corner of the street. They did not reach it one second too soon; the patient had scarcely passed its threshold when she was seized again with a coughing spell more violent, more terrible than she ever had before.

But suddenly the cough ceased and Marguerite gave a scream of terror; the mother had fallen against the wall, pale as death, and the blood flowed from her mouth. At the cries of the child the mistress of the house and several lodgers came running in. A scene of consternation and excitement followed; every

one busied himself, every one had a different advice to give, but no one acted; every one asked what was to be done and no one could answer the difficult question. After long deliberation they dragged the poor sufferer into the nearest room; they put her, still senseless, on a mattress, and a neighbor, more practical than the rest, resolved at last to call in the nearest physician.

"She will not recover, that is certain," said Mme. Chabrodié, the hostess, a stout woman with a rubicund, shining face. "What ill-luck it was for me to give her a room." Marguerite hears these words. The thought of death was already present in her mind; she had seen her father die, and now her mother was to leave her also! She uttered a piercing cry of despair and fell on the floor beside her dying mother.

That cry of despair from the only being which kept her back on earth seemed to recall the mother from her stupor; her heavy eyelids half opened and her glassy eyes rested on her child.

"May God bless you — Marguerite — my little darling!" she murmured slowly. "You will not forget the house — your grandfather——"

Her lips were yet moving, but no sound came forth, and she again relapsed into a state of lethargy.

"What does she say?" asked one of the women.

"She speaks of a house," answered Mme. Chabrodié.

"She is evidently delirious. The little one has no other home but the asylum, for her father is dead. She has no relations as far as I know, and she is entirely without means."

Such reflections were odious in presence of these two poor creatures. The approaching death and cruel separation were torturing enough, but such is the world! The dying mother spoke no more, her eyes grew dim, her face became more livid. Marguerite held her hand, but the stiff, cold fingers did not respond to the loving touch of the child.

Poor child! She was now all alone. A mother's love was no longer her protection.

When the physician entered, he pushed back the women who surrounded the couch, but he saw at a first glance that his services were of no avail. Death had arrived before he had; it had freed forever Marguerite's mother from her pains and cruel sufferings.

CHAPTER III.

MARGUERITE.

ON the following day M. Quesnoy waited in vain for the three plates in blue and gold which the stranger had promised to send him; a second day also elapsed. He was mortified, mortified especially because he had to acknowledge that he was mistaken in his judgment and that his wife was right in calling him foolish.

"It is all over, you may go a mourning," she said at meal-time when inquiring if the plates had arrived; "they are lost."

And she asserted this in the tone of one who speaks an indisputable truth.

"What do you know?" was Quesnoy's dry answer; "the lady may be sick or occupied, and momentarily prevented from sending them."

"Pshaw! You may imagine so, but I am greatly mistaken if you will ever see those plates," repeated Dorothea with provoking persistency.

Quesnoy made no reply, but his temper betrayed his feelings.

He did not care a fig about the plates; the pitcher of old Sèvres was too good a bargain to

stop to trouble himself about the loss of the thirty *sous*, but he felt humiliated because the event did not confirm the favorable opinion he had passed on the seller.

So true it is that when we have formed a high opinion of a person, it is painful to discover that we have been mistaken.

To tell the truth, the old antiquarian did not forgive the lady for having abused his confidence. Had he been logical, he would have been more indulgent, as he had first cheated her; but no, the human heart ignores such reasoning. We are always inclined to exact for ourselves the application of the golden rule, yet we forget so easily the divine precept to do to our neighbor what we would like him to do to us.

The morning of the third day had passed without bringing any news of the blue and gold plates. Quesnoy no longer concealed his disappointment. He became so irritable that his wife was seriously alarmed.

"Assuredly," she said to herself, "to be in such a state of mind, there must be something else besides the insignificant loss of the plates." Although Mme. Quesnoy delighted occasionally in teasing her husband, she was nevertheless a good and devoted wife.

She accordingly watched him attentively for a few hours and was soon convinced that she had guessed right.

The impatience of her husband had not only a moral cause, it was also and principally produced by physical ailment. Two or three days before he had been caught in the rain whilst going to an auction, and, though feeling a chill, he did not wish to leave.

Mme. Quesnoy remembered that circumstance. "Who knows," she said with anxiety, "if there is not some sickness a brooding!"

Her fears were only too well grounded. Before night, her husband had to take to bed, and next morning all the symptoms of congestion of the lungs were manifest. When the physician who had been promptly summoned informed Mme. Quesnoy that her husband was dangerously ill she was overcome with grief. She was a small, delicate-looking woman, who always saw things in their most gloomy aspect.

After all, there was some reason for this disposition to melancholy; bad health and deep sorrow, the most bitter deception which a loving woman can possibly suffer, had affected her. Of her seven children not one was living; most of them had passed away without

being able to recognize her love or to call her by the sweet name of mother. One girl only—a beautiful little girl, weak and delicate like herself—had resisted the sickness of her infancy. During nine years she was the joy, the pride, nay, almost the idol, of her parents; but just at the time when they cherished the hope of seeing her grow strong and robust, scarlet fever took her off in a few days, and their home was again deserted.

Twenty years had elapsed since the death of little Susie, still the wound of the mother's heart was not healed; often she imagined she heard the graceful prattling of the child or her little footsteps, as she went dancing up and down the stairs of the old house. The sight of a child renewed her grief. In her dreams at night the little figure which she had loved so much appeared before her, and she started up in her sleep, calling the name of Susie.

As old age added more infirmity to her feeble constitution she felt more than ever the value of the love and support of a child.

At the sickness of her husband she had reached the height of desolation. She believed that he also would leave her and that she would be alone in the world. As soon as the doctor spoke of danger her heart failed

her. Her hopes had so often deceived her, no wonder she should give up hope!

Yet Mme. Quesnoy tried to conceal her fears from her husband; she did not wish to alarm him, but he knew her too well to be deceived by the apparent calmness. By her anxious looks, her red eyes and the heart-rending sighs to which she gave vent whenever she thought to be far enough from the sick-bed to escape notice, he saw that her gayety was forced. It was Quesnoy himself who endeavored to keep up her courage.

"Be of good cheer, my love," he said; "I am not going to die yet; your emancipation would be too much for you. In a few days I will be up again."

"I hope so, Jerome," she answered mournfully, as she bathed his fever-burning forehead. But, unable to restrain her tears, she slipped out of the room and returned with red, swollen eyes.

On one occasion, almost without knowing what she was doing, Dorothea went down to the store. The aspect of that deserted place and of the small room adjoining, where Quesnoy kept his pots of mastic, his tools, his brushes, increased her sorrow. Falling on the nearest chair, the poor woman covered her

face with her apron and gave free course to her sighs and tears.

She had thus been weeping for a few minutes when she thought she heard a noise outside. She raised her head and listened. No, she was not mistaken; somebody knocked at the door.

Mme. Quesnoy hastily wiped away her tears and fixed herself up to go to the door. Great was her surprise when she saw a little girl, thin, feeble, and dressed in mourning. Her face was pale, and her large black eyes had a distracted look painful to behold.

In her apron she had a parcel carefully wrapped in old paper. On seeing Mme. Quesnoy she started and seemed to be disappointed.

"Whom do you wish to see, my little lady?" asked Mme. Quesnoy, noticing with admiration the long eyelashes of the child and the beautiful locks of her hair which fell gracefully over her neck as white as ivory.

"I would like to speak to the old gentleman who keeps this store," replied the child, with a tremulous accent. "I am bringing the plates which mamma had promised him."

"Oh, very well, my darling; I know all about them and will give them to him." And

Mme. Quesnoy took the plates which the child handed reluctantly.

"Can I not see the old gentleman?" she insisted.

"No, my dear; he is in bed, very sick," said Mme. Quesnoy; "but I am his wife, and shall give him the plates; you need not feel uneasy about them."

However, the child was not satisfied, and continued to look at her with an air of perplexity.

"Do you wish something else?" continued Dorothea, seeing that the little girl had another parcel in her apron.

"Yes," she said, with a heavy sigh. "Mamma told me that the old gentleman is an honest man, and I would like to ask him to keep these books for me; they are my mother's books. I would not like to have them taken by Mme. Chabrodié."

"Do you live at Mme. Chabrodié's?" asked Mme. Quesnoy, more and more surprised at the strange air and the distinguished manners of the little girl.

"Yes, madame."

"And why did your mother not come with you?"

"Mamma is dead," said Marguerite, in a low

tone. "She died Monday night; and as I have nobody to take care of me, they say that I must go to the orphan asylum." Large tears had gathered in her eyes; but, with an energy of will far above her age, she repressed the groans which upheaved her chest.

"Your mother is dead!—poor little one!" exclaimed Mme. Quesnoy, whose sympathy was aroused by her own suffering. "She died Monday night, did you say? Was it not on Monday she came here and sold to my husband the pitcher which is standing yonder? Are you certain it was on that day, dear little orphan of God?"

Marguerite tried no longer to repress her tears, for she could read in Mme. Quesnoy's face an expression of love and pity which her young heart could not misunderstand.

"Yes," replied the girl, very low; "the doctor said that she burst a blood-vessel."

"The poor woman!" sighed Mme. Quesnoy. "No wonder—she had such a cough. I remember how I trembled when only hearing her. My God! my God! how sad is our life!"

And she, too, shed tears. She thought of the anguish which the mother must have suffered at the thought of leaving without pro-

tection in this world a little creature so delicate and so charming.

"What is your name, my little angel?" she asked, tenderly putting her arm around the neck of the child.

"Marguerite," was the answer.

"Marguerite what?"

"Marguerite Albrun."

"And you have really no relatives?"

"No, not one," said the child, with a deep sigh; "and Mme. Chabrodié said I should feel happy to be admitted into the house of abandoned children. But I do not know how it is in that house—do you, madame? Do you think they will be kind to me there?"

The touching simplicity of the child went straight to the heart of her worthy questioner.

"I do not know," she replied hesitatingly. Then, irresistibly carried away, she added: "All I can say is that I would not like to see one of my children enter the place."

"Mme. Chabrodié pretends that mamma spoke of that house before her death, but I did not hear it, and she never spoke of it to me," continued Marguerite, whose little face became more and more gloomy.

"Poor woman!" repeated Mme. Quesnoy, in a tone of compassion, "if she did do so she

must have suffered very much before coming to such a conclusion. But I hear my husband knock; he wants me. I have to leave you, my child. May God forgive me! You have made me forget my poor patient."

"Will you take the books?" asked Marguerite firmly. And she took from her apron an "Imitation of Christ" and a splendid prayer-book, the magnificent binding and gold clasps of which showed that it had long and often been used.

"They belonged to mamma; they were the only ones which she had kept. She sold all her other books, but she never wanted to part with these, because her mother had given them to her. Mme. Chabrodié has taken everything we had. She said that mamma owed her board for a week, and that the money she had received for the pitcher was not sufficient to cover all expenses and compensate her for all her trouble. I have concealed the books and the plates, so that she could not take *them*. I know that mamma had promised the plates to the old gentleman, and I thought he would be kind enough to keep the books for me. I fear I might lose them if I go to the poor-house, and this is all I possess of her."

"You may depend on it, my child, we shall

take good care of them," said Mme. Quesnoy, touched by this mark of confidence. "And come soon to see me again, will you? Tell Mme. Chabrodié not to send you away before having seen me; tell her I said so—, I, Mme. Quesnoy, of the old curiosity shop." Marguerite assented; a brighter expression was visible on her delicate features.

"Good-bye, madame; you are very kind, and I thank you heartily."

And, in the enthusiasm of her gratitude, she raised her head as if waiting for an embrace.

At this motion of the child all the maternal instincts of Mme. Quesnoy vibrated with unaccustomed energy.

She fondly took Marguerite to her heart and embraced her with the most tender affection, uttering sweet words that go from heart to heart.

But the repeated knocks from the room of her husband recalled the good Dorothea to her duties as sick-nurse.

"Adieu, my darling," she said; "I can stay no longer. Do not fail to come to see me again. Adieu."

And, although in a hurry, she watched the child going away.

"Dear angel," she said to herself, "she must be of the age of Susie. And to think that such a lovely being should go to the house for abandoned children! It grieves my heart. And the mother!—it is dreadful! I must tell Jerome of all that."

CHAPTER IV.

QUALMS OF CONSCIENCE.

IT was not without many interior reproaches that Mme. Quesnoy went back to her husband.

"With whom have you been babbling in the store?" he asked boorishly; "with a prattler like yourself, no doubt. It seems to me that for once you might have shortened your gossip."

We have said that M. Quesnoy was not a man of bad temper; but however good-natured a man may be he generally becomes intractable when sick. Where is the mother or wife who has not experienced this fact?

"I talked to the little girl of the other evening," answered Mme. Quesnoy, who had the good sense not to notice the bad humor of her

husband. "She has brought the blue and gold plates; and, just think, Jerome, her mother is dead!"

"What mother? What little girl? What do you mean?" said the sick man with increasing impatience.

"Why, you know the poor lady who sold you the pitcher of old Sèvres?" replied Mme. Quesnoy. "The child has brought the plates which we had given up as lost; and if she has not come sooner, as we often wondered, it is because her mother died that same evening."

"What evening?" asked the exasperated patient. "I do not understand one word of what you say."

"Well, it was on Monday evening, the same day they came to the store. The poor lady lived near by at Mme. Chabrodié's. She had scarcely returned home when she died suddenly. You remember how she coughed and you told me how ill she looked. The little one will be sent to the House of Refuge, as she has no relative in this world."

A loud groan from her husband changed Mme. Quesnoy's current of thought.

"What is the matter?" she asked with anxiety. "Is your pain in the side growing worse?"

"A great deal worse," he replied, moaning. "I feel as if a knife pierced my chest. Oh, how I suffer!"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed his wife, heart-broken. "I will apply another mustard-plaster; perhaps the heat will give you some relief."

And, completely taken up with the care of her patient, she forgot all about the little girl and her dead mother.

Moreover, Quesnoy would not have been able to answer her; his faculties were, so to say, paralyzed by the intensity of his sufferings. Yet the few words his wife had said made an impression on him and suggested to him a thought which he could not banish: "Death, which has so suddenly cut short the existence of the stranger, may at any moment strike me also."

The doctor arrived toward evening; he looked grave; Quesnoy was worse. Next day he was there again very early; he looked more earnest still. The fever had increased, whilst the strength of the old man was visibly on the decline.

Doctor Gabriel Belfonds was a handsome young man, admired by the world, but who possessed in a high degree that gravity and

dignity so becoming to the medical profession. To a superior intellect he joined a big heart, and by his simple, unaffected manners he easily gained the confidence of his patients. He was at the *début* of his career; his practice, still limited, was principally among the lower classes; but wiser than many of his colleagues, who judge of the importance of a case by the weight of their patients' purses, he did not consider it beneath his dignity to give to the poor his greatest attention and all the help of his talent and skill.

The young doctor was full of the sacred fire of his profession, which he considered to be the best in the world; and he was determined not to shrink from any sacrifice which the duties of his profession might impose upon him.

Gabriel's friends called him "a good fellow," and never was this often misused appellation better merited.

After having carefully examined his patient and given to Mme. Quesnoy the most minute instructions, Dr. Belfonds remained in silence near the bed. His countenance indicated reflection and doubt.

Mme. Quesnoy had left the room, and he was now at liberty to speak openly to the old man; but still he hesitated, not knowing

whether he should inform him of the gravity of his condition or let him run the risk of passing away perhaps without perceiving it.

Quesnoy himself solved the question. "I am not doing well, doctor," he said, in broken words. "I have never been so low—all my strength is going—yet I hope you will save me, will you not, doctor? I am not at the end of the rope yet."

The doctor could now give a free opinion.

"I do not give up the hope of saving you, M. Quesnoy," he said. "I have seen patients more dangerously ill than you are recover to perfect health; yet I must not conceal the fact that at your age pneumonia is always a serious thing. Some complications might arise in your condition against which science would be powerless."

Quesnoy's face showed little emotion; his eyelids dropped, his lips quivered a second, that was all.

"In any case," continued M. Belfonds, "you would do well, perhaps, to call a minister of religion."

"Am I so far gone? Thank you, doctor, for having warned me; it is always good to prepare for that long journey from which we do not return."

"You are not afraid to die, M. Quesnoy?" asked the doctor, with great concern.

"No, I am not afraid," answered Quesnoy, with a little boasting. "Besides, what good would it do me? If I have to die I shall die, afraid or not afraid. My only grief is at leaving my poor wife. She has already had so much to suffer by the loss of her children, and it will be hard to see me depart also. But no one can help that."

"You are happy in having such an easy conscience," replied the doctor.

"Certainly. I have not been worse than anybody else. I have always worked hard; I have earned my bread honestly; I have never injured any one."

The old merchant seemed to speak with conviction, but whilst he was speaking he had before his eyes a gloomy picture—that of the poor sick widow and the little girl with her sad look. How did he dare to assert that he never wronged any one, after having acted toward them as he did?

The stoicism of the old man at the probable approach of death was only feigned. He did not give up the hope of recovering. The doctor had said he might get better; he wanted it, he expected it.

On the other hand, he might die, and the thought of this eventful probability did not leave his mind.

The doctor had congratulated him on having nothing on his conscience. Surely he could not deny that during his long commercial career he often sought his own advantage to the detriment of that of his neighbor; yet, after all, he had been as honest as the common run of merchants, if not more so.

Will God take him to task for some little crooked dealing? Will He punish him for some petty fault?

Feeble and suffering as he was, Quesnoy endeavored to make an examination of his ways. As we said above, he had not always been scrupulously honest in his dealings. But where is the merchant who has nothing with which to reproach himself in this regard? He had often told an untruth in order to persuade a customer to make a purchase; but was that really a great wrong?

His greatest wrong was, without doubt, the dishonesty of which he became guilty when buying the pitcher of old Sèvres. He confessed it, it was mean not to give the full value of the object bought to a poor widow evidently reduced to the greatest distress. Should a

similar case present itself he certainly would act differently. Even more, he would compensate the lady, if it were possible. But she was dead. The child, however, was living. Could he render her some service? He would do it willingly if a chance presented itself. It would, perhaps, be the best way of getting rid of his harassing scruple of conscience. At last Jerome Quesnoy made a vow, a sincere and solemn vow, which he hoped God would hear with favor.

"If I do recover from this sickness," he said, "I promise to find out the real condition of that orphan, and, if necessary, to come to her assistance according to my limited means."

Toward midnight the patient seemed to feel better. He was so quiet that Mme. Quesnoy, sitting at his bedside, thought he was asleep.

"Dorothea," he said suddenly, "do you think I have been a bad man?"

"You a bad man!" exclaimed Mme. Quesnoy, with vivacity. "No, assuredly not, my dear. You did not drink, swear, or do anything bad that I know. You have always been industrious, and, as far as I am concerned, I cannot reproach you with the least thing. Why do you ask me that question?"

Quesnoy gave a sob.

"There are some things in my life which I should never have done," he murmured. "If I do recover I shall try to do better."

"Ah! Jerome, do not speak thus," said his wife, in tears; "you pierce my heart."

"Do not weep, dear," replied the patient calmly. "If I die you will not be without bread, and that is a consolation. I have saved something; there is money at the savings bank, at the *Crédit Foncier*. I have some state bonds, and the stock of our store is worth a nice round sum of money."

"Ah! my dear, what is money to me if I must lose you? I hope I shall follow you soon. If little Susie were living things would be different perhaps; but to be all alone——" Her last words were lost in convulsive sobbing.

A heavy sigh, caused both by physical and moral suffering, came from the lips of the old man.

"Was it really worth while," he thought, "to have toiled and saved all his life if now he had to abandon everything? Of what use are now to him the rare porcelains, the old furniture, of which he had been so proud?"

He closed his eyes, breathed heavily, and after some time fell asleep. But his sleep was

restless. His wife, always at his bedside, noticed his every movement; she heard him speak in a low voice; leaning toward him, she could distinguish these words:

“The little girl——”

“Poor man!” said Mme. Quesnoy, “he is thinking of our Susie.”

But Mme. Quesnoy was mistaken. No, it was not the pale face nor the sad and imploring eyes of Susie which were haunting old M. Quesnoy.

CHAPTER V.

MARGUERITE'S MOTHER.

IT was on a Sunday evening that Dr. Belfonds had the serious conversation with the old antiquarian which we related in the preceding chapter. When leaving his patient the young doctor went up the boulevard, with the intention of going to a lecture to be given by some great man on the liberty of thought, that cancerous wound of modern society which no physician is able to cure.

Whilst walking along at a rapid pace he thought over the symptoms of his patient and

tried to guess at the issue of the disease. He took great interest in Quesnoy. He had been called to see him several times before, and being himself a lover of old porcelain he had often been at the store to converse with the old *bric-a-brac* dealer and to admire his curiosities. Quesnoy's originality and bluntness of manners had pleased him, and he would have given a great deal to save his life. Gabriel Belfonds, although having made brilliant medical studies, was not one of those who see nothing beyond matter, and who imagine to give proof of a transcending intellect by denying everything outside the domain of positive science. He did not admit, like many of his colleagues, that the human heart is only "*a big muscle*," without the least relation to our affections; and although he had not seen a "soul," he was far from denying its existence.

But the thoughts of the young physician presently took another course.

He had reached the long avenue which the poor widow had followed with her child a few hours before her death. The doctor, we have said, was going to an anti-materialistic lecture; but he was not going there alone; and the thought of his companion, who was perhaps waiting, made him hasten his step.

Having arrived at the beautiful house with the railing which had given support to the sick lady, he rang the bell, and when the servant opened the door he entered with the freedom of one who feels himself at home.

“At last!” exclaimed a fresh laughing voice as he opened the door of the dining-room. “I began to think that one of your tedious patients was going to keep you away. I did not like the idea of giving up the lecture to-night. Not that I expect to enjoy your—I was going to say preacher instead of lecturer—for it is only a sermon; but no matter, Gabriel; I am glad you came.” The person who thus addressed him was a charming young lady eighteen years of age. Her black eyes were glittering with delight. An expression of pride and happiness easy to explain appeared on the face of the young gentleman.

“Thank you, Hortense,” he said. “You were sure I would come, were you not? Where is uncle?”

“Oh, papa has already gone. You know he likes to get a good seat and to be there on time,” answered the young lady, laughingly; “besides, we must not complain, for he will reserve our seats. I thought I would wait for you to button my gloves. I know you are in-

comparably skillful. Nobody can button a glove as well as you, my dear cousin."

When Gabriel was bending familiarly over the aristocratic little hand stretched out to him to button the perfumed glove which imprisoned it, every one could see that Gabriel Belfonds joined to his quality of cousin a title still sweeter, which endeared him still more to the charming little person who had requested his services.

Hortense was the daughter of General Malbrègue, and among her many admiring suitors she had selected the young doctor as her future husband.

Her father, a man of stiff and haughty manners, was of opinion that she might have done better, but he was not opposed to her choice.

Besides, as we have seen, Belfonds belonged to the family on the mother's side; moreover, if he was a learned scholar, he was also a perfect gentleman, and his uncle had unwillingly yielded to the charm exercised on him by the young doctor.

And then—and then—let us say it in a whisper, for the subject was never spoken of—General Malbrègue had had in his family a terrible example of the danger of resisting beyond reason the will of an ardent and ener-

getic young girl, especially when she has not been wisely directed by an intelligent mother.

For this reason he thought it more prudent to allow Hortense to follow freely the impulses of her heart.

Those who had not known the Malbrègue family very long thought that Hortense was the only child. Such was not the case. The general had another girl by his first marriage, but for years there was no mention made of her, as her father had cast her off.

The story of Marguerite Malbrègue is quickly told; it is the story, unfortunately so frequent in the world, of a self-willed, disobedient girl who revolts against the authority of a domineering and unjust step-mother. Marguerite was twelve years old when her father married again. This was her first grief.

She had loved her amiable mother with that exclusive and passionate tenderness natural to a young heart. She could never forgive her father for having been less faithful than herself to that idolized and better-deserving memory; and when, after the lapse of only one year, she saw him contract a second marriage, the blow was terrible.

There arose between father and daughter a fatal misunderstanding. The general loved

Marguerite; he understood the emptiness caused by death in that young existence; he justly felt that he was not the man to fill that gap and to replace what cannot be replaced. He thought the only remedy was to give his child a second mother, and this he did as soon as the opportunity came of making an advantageous marriage.

Marguerite looked upon her father as selfish, cruel and heartless.

Alas! M. Malbrègue's wrong was not perhaps so much in the marriage as in the choice he made.

The second Mme. Malbrègue was by no means of a conciliating disposition, and seemed in every respect to be the opposite of the first one. It soon became evident that she and her young step-daughter would not easily agree. Marguerite, who had never left her parents, was sent to a boarding-school.

During six years she was only occasionally at her father's house. Mme. Malbrègue, ambitious to be supreme mistress, had always managed to make her spend the vacation at the distant house of her mother's parents. Yet the day came when this state of things was to come to an end. The young lady was more than of age to leave school, and under-

stood too well the motive of her exile. She came home, but not under circumstances necessary to make life at least bearable, if not agreeable. She felt the wrong of having been isolated from her home, and was bent on making the principal author thereof pay dearly for this injustice.

A little sister, and two brothers still in the cradle, had been born during her long absence. Marguerite might have loved them, for she was naturally affectionate and devoted; but she was so profoundly irritated against Mme. Malbrègue that she closed her heart to the little ones only because they were her children.

The general's house had become the theatre of daily scenes of contentions. The dissension between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was the only topic of conversation.

Among the relatives of the family several took the latter's part; among others, Mme. Grandjean, sister of the general, who, since her husband's death, had come to live with her brother, and who appreciated the lovely qualities of her niece.

Marguerite was of remarkable beauty and charming in society. Mme. Malbrègue hoped she would soon marry and then leave the house; but the young lady, as if guessing the

thoughts of her mother-in-law, and unwilling to give her that satisfaction, seemed in no hurry to give up her independence. Besides, the suitors who pleased her father were not to her taste, and those who pleased her were invariably refused by the general.

At last the mortified and wounded heart of Marguerite made a choice, but a choice which brought consternation into the family. The young man was only clerk in a banking house, and although of rather distinguished and captivating manners, which might have justified Marguerite's choice, there were certain rumors circulated detrimental to the integrity of his character.

These rumors and his social inequality gave to M. Malbrègue a certain right to refuse the wish of his daughter. But he offended her by his way of doing it. Instead of reasoning with Marguerite and trying to gain her over, little by little, to his own conviction, he commanded her rudely and peremptorily to give up a marriage too nonsensical and too ridiculous, he said, to be discussed at all. This was the drop of water that made the vessel overflow.

The noble daughter of M. Malbrègue was proud, and contradiction went against her

grain; moreover, she was irritated by constant quarrels, brought about, as she thought, without cause. She determined to make a sensational move. She was twenty-one years old and had a small fortune left her by her mother. She resolved to assert her independence, to escape paternal authority and to shake off the tyrannical yoke of her step-mother. She secretly rented an apartment in the house inhabited by her aunt, Mme. Grandjean; and profited by the short absence of her father to have transported thither not only her personal effects but also many articles which had belonged to her mother.

The conduct of his daughter naturally grieved the general to the very core of his heart. He never could forgive his sister for having encouraged the young lady to make that foolish, uncalled-for step; and he held her responsible for the events which followed. These events were easily foreseen.

After a few months, the imprudent Marguerite, in defiance of her father's orders, respectfully sent in a legal petition, and on the expiration of the legal time, contracted the marriage which he so vigorously condemned.

The disapproval of M de. Malbrègue was unfortunately but too well justified.

A few weeks after the marriage most serious discoveries were made at the bank of S. M. & Cie. A cleverly conducted system of embezzlement came to light. A rigorous examination was made, and the culprit was found out to be no other than M. Albrun, the unworthy husband of Marguerite, who escaped the hands of justice by a hasty flight.

The general, seeing his name implicated in such a scandalous affair, almost lost his mind. He thought he was dishonored, and his anger against his daughter knew no bounds.

He forgot that she was too innocent to suspect perversity in others, and he showed no mercy in her cruel and unexpected affliction. He took an oath that in future she was nothing to him, that he would neither see her nor hear her name pronounced.

His only wish was to forget that he had a daughter so ungrateful and so unnatural.

This was in perfect accord with the desire of Mme. Malbrègue, who was in her glory. The general's wishes were gratified. Marguerite's name was never pronounced, and he never saw her again.

As for her, cast off by society, which has regard only for success, pointed out as the wife of a thief, and almost cursed by her father, she

had but one resource, namely, to leave the capital where life had become unbearable to her.

How could she live in abjection and abandonment where formerly she had been sought and idolized by everybody? What became of her? Nobody knew. Some thought she had joined her husband in America; others whispered that she had been seen in London; but the mystery was never cleared up, and finally she was forgotten by all. And why think of her? Was she not unfortunate? It requires courage to remember the unfortunate.

Time had gradually healed up the deep wound which the pride of the general had received. As for his heart, nobody knew to what degree it had suffered. The haughty and cold reserve of M. Malbrègue did not allow any one to judge of his feelings. He had forbidden all to speak of his oldest daughter in his presence, and his order was respected. She was therefore as much as dead to him; but no, the comparison is not correct, for generally the memory of the dead is lovingly kept up by the living, whilst M. Malbrègue did his best to efface from his memory the remembrance of Marguerite.

The bank affair had been hushed up imme-

diately; the directors of the bank, in deference to the family of the general, had given up the pursuit of the embezzler. It is not surprising, therefore, that nine years later, viz., at the time of our narrative, this whole deplorable history was forgotten except by those who had been actors in it, or by that class of people who seem to keep in their memory a register of all the events which do not concern them. Gabriel Belfonds, though brought up in the province, intimately connected with the Malbrègue family, had only a dim knowledge of the facts which we have related, and even his bride could not have given him much information on the subject. Being only a small girl at the time of Marguerite's marriage, she remembered her half-sister as a remarkably handsome young lady who had often excited her childish admiration, but of whom her mother, who died two years later, never spoke but in a whisper, and only to recommend to her not to follow her example. What had become of that sister? She did not know, and, to tell the truth, she never troubled herself about it. Selfish by nature and a spoiled child, Hortense was contented with her lot and satisfied; her father had never been very demonstrative toward her, but, on the

other hand, he had always treated her with boundless indulgence, and especially since the death of her mother. The young girl had no other rule to follow than her own will. Although the beauty of Hortense Malbrègue was not to be compared to that of her older sister, yet she was a pretty little brunette, graceful, playful, captivating in the extreme. Gabriel Belfonds therefore was right to think himself the happiest of men after having made the conquest of a heart priceless in his eyes.

He had rented a house not far from the residence of the general, and expected in a few weeks to comfortably settle down with his young wife. How bright and rosy the future presented itself to him! On their way to the lecture that evening the young couple's topic of conversation was their future home, the improvements they would make, their bridal trip away from the cold mist of Paris, and so on, and so on; so that Gabriel had lost for a moment the very memory of old Quesnoy and his sickness.

Yet during the discourse of the eminent lecturer, to which he gave all his attention, whilst Hortense was all distraction, the visit he had made before came back to his memory. On their way home he still thought of it. And as

his cousin teased him for being so taciturn, he frankly told her the reason of it.

It was the first time that he forgot himself in her presence. She did not like him to mention a subject of so much gravity; she did not care to be initiated into the details of his profession, of that horrible profession for which she had the greatest disgust. Gabriel had violated the rules of etiquette in speaking to her of a subject so trivial, so repugnant to her elegant and refined taste!

How unbecoming!

Yet Hortense felt that she owed him an answer.

"Who is this old man in whom you take such great interest?" she asked. The doctor was obliged to her for the apparent sympathy she expressed. He immediately related to her all he knew about the old *bric-a-brac* dealer. He gave an amusing description of what he styled his "shop," and the young lady, forgetting her ill-temper, listened with contentment—nay more, she accepted gracefully Gabriel's invitation to visit the curiosity shop of the old man and to select some of the objects of art for their future parlor.

"On the express condition, however, of his speedy and thorough recovery," said Hortense.

"I have a perfect horror of sick people, and if anything could have made me hesitate to marry you it is that you must visit them. I wish, Gabriel, you were not a physician and had not to look constantly at all sorts of horrible things. I know it gives you the blues, and will make you melancholy. No; I need not put it in the future tense; if you were not so already you would not have spoken to me as you did that evening."

"Well, well," replied Gabriel, smiling at this singular imputation, "I am neither melancholy nor on the road of becoming so; but you must grant, my dear Hortense, that a doctor has to look at life from a serious point of view."

"Well, yes, let it be so; but don't exact the same thing from me," she replied jokingly, although she thought so at heart. "I detest seriousness in everything. I do not want my life to be serious. I want it to be gay. Remember, therefore, you must not speak to me again of the sick, the dying and other mournful subjects, otherwise——"

"Well?"

"Otherwise I will not marry you."

Although those words were uttered with an air of tricky raillery which showed what im-

portance should be attached to them, yet they pierced like a pointed weapon the good and generous heart of Gabriel.

"For no earthly reason would I ever displease you, dear Hortense," he replied, with some sadness in his tone of voice. "If your life is not a happy one it will be through no fault of mine, believe me. But if you love me, never tell me again, I beg you, that you regret that I am a physician; this grieves me too much."

"I am sorry," she replied, "but you can easily prevent that by never speaking to me of anything concerning your profession, which I will not now qualify; and you ought to thank me for it, too. And now I have something most interesting to tell you. Papa has tickets for the ball which will be given next week by the Artist Club. Of course you will accompany me. What would I do without you? I am so happy! I will take in all the amusements possible before settling down to be an austere and grave madame."

"Do you think you will ever attain such a dignity?" asked Gabriel sarcastically, admiring the fresh-looking face turned toward him.

"I don't know and sometimes I am afraid not," she replied, with a silvery smile. "But

what do you say about the ball, Gabriel? You will come with us, will you not?"

"With pleasure, if it is possible," said the doctor. "You know how happy I am to be your obedient cavalier."

They had now reached the house of M. Malbrègue. Gabriel Belfonds, as a rule, spent Sunday evenings with the general and his daughter. He was about to enter when a messenger requested him to attend a patient without delay.

"How provoking!" murmured Hortense, as he left hastily; "one is never sure of him. Why did he embrace this horrible profession?"

She went in, discontented and vexed. Gabriel also was disappointed; he felt as if there were a burden on his heart.

The manner in which Hortense had answered him when speaking of Quesnoy went sorely to his heart. Was he mistaken in the hope of finding in his betrothed what a man of heart and of sense expects to find—a friend who takes an interest in all his occupations, to whom he can speak freely on everything that interests him, and who will administer to him consolation in the midst of his cares, fatigues and contradictions, inseparable from his medical career? Will she always love above every-

thing else the distractions and pleasures of the world, and will she persistently close her eyes to the serious side of life?

No; Gabriel could not, would not, believe it.

He was too fondly attached to the young girl to admit that she was selfish and frivolous. Obligated to see, to feel her failings, he excused them, extenuated them with the most tender indulgence. She was so young! In time she will become wiser, more composed, more practical. After being married he was sure to find in her all he could desire, and a great deal more than he would ever have dared to dream of.

O, what a witch youth can be!—and illusion, what an enchantress!

Thus Gabriel Belfonds was reasoning with himself whilst directing his steps toward the house, where his presence was desired. He now tried to drive the subject from his mind, but it was in vain; the painful impression which he had received could not be completely effaced.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

THE illness of Jerome Quesnoy turned out not to be as severe as its first symptoms gave reason to fear. On Monday morning the doctor found a slight change for the better in the condition of his patient. A favorable turn set in, and in a few days M. Belfonds could announce to Mme. Quesnoy that her husband was out of danger.

The joy of the good lady knew no bounds when she saw that all her terrible apprehensions had disappeared.

More than ever she was all care and attention to Quesnoy. And although she generally received in return only meagre thanks or some words of impatience, her solicitude lost nothing of its habitual tenderness.

"Men are all the same," she said, with a gracious smile; "they are only big children. They endure better great suffering during their illness than little inconveniences during their convalescence. Poor fellow! after all he has gone through it is no wonder he should be a little peevish."

And what of Quesnoy now? Had he forgotten, as many do forget, the resolutions made on a sick-bed when health has been restored to them?

No, he had not forgotten it; he often thought of it and intended to put it into execution as soon as his strength and leisure would permit him to do so.

To be sure, now that death had retreated, his conscience no longer reproached him so severely for the wrong which he had done to Marguerite's mother; he was not in so great a hurry to make restitution; he postponed it till an opportunity would offer itself. Yet the old man was sincere in his determination to gather more particulars regarding the little orphan, and to make himself useful to her.

It should have been quite natural for Quesnoy to communicate his projects to his wife, one might suppose; but no, he felt the greatest reluctance to say a word to her on the subject.

She did not understand, he thought, his remorse for having paid so little for the pitcher of old Sèvres, nor the interest he took in a child, who after all, was a perfect stranger to him. Besides, was it necessary that she should read his innermost conscience?

Yet, if he did not breathe a syllable regard-

ing little Marguerite, he was most anxious, on the contrary, that Dorothea should resume the subject she had introduced at the beginning of his illness, and to which she had never since alluded. Where was the child? What had become of her? Did his wife know it? He was very anxious to hear it, but obstinately feigned not to care to know it. This state of things seemed to prolong itself indefinitely; for, although Mme. Quesnoy was often thinking of the orphan, she was far from guessing her husband's preoccupations, and kept a profound silence regarding her own. She did not wish by mentioning that subject to recall to her dear patient his store, his business; she avoided it all the more carefully as perfect rest was necessary to Quesnoy. He was but too prone to lament over the loss in business incident to his sickness, a loss which it was not his pleasure to exaggerate.

Through a sort of business jealousy he had never taken an assistant, so that for three weeks' rest, despite the good will of his wife, who did all she could to satisfy the customers, the sales were almost nothing.

The old antiquarian was most impatient to see his treasures again; he expected to see the store topsy-turvy, and was heartbroken at the

thought of finding, no doubt, his most beautiful pieces broken, his wife not being able to distinguish old Dresden from old Sèvres.

But Dr. Belfonds had so strictly enjoined extreme prudence, that he did not dare to violate the order not to leave the room.

Day after day Mme. Quesnoy expected to see Marguerite return as she had promised, and the good old lady began to think that the child had been sent to some orphan asylum.

Since her husband had become convalescent, she was often tempted to run over to Mme. Chabrodié's boarding-house to find out what she was so anxious to know, but she never had a moment's leisure. During the day the store kept her in, and at night Quesnoy became so impatient and irritable that in conscience she could not leave him alone five minutes.

Thus, without saying a word about the orphan, both husband and wife were constantly thinking of her. At last they came to an explanation.

It was Sunday evening, and the store had been closed all day. Mme. Quesnoy was without anxiety in regard to business; her husband's health was steadily improving; for the first time he had gone down to the back room, and, sitting in his big arm-chair near the

fire, had taken his supper with excellent appetite.

The happiness which was again shining on his face reflected itself on that of his wife.

While thus looking at him with a tender smile on her lips, the thought came to her that now she could conveniently leave him for a few minutes to go to the boarding-house for news regarding Marguerite. "Jerome," she said suddenly, with some embarrassment, not knowing how he would take her proposition, "Jerome, next Thursday will be Christmas Day, you know."

"Why, yes, I know it too well," he replied, with a sigh. "This illness has been very long! It is time to resume my business, and that seriously, too, in order to make good the losses of last month."

"You will soon be able to go about as usual," replied his wife gayly. "I hope we shall commence the new year happily—and that poor little girl—who knows what kind of a New Year's Day she will have? Did I ever tell you, my dear, that she brought the books that had belonged to her mother to keep them for her?"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Quesnoy, with affected indifference.

"Why, you know, that little girl who brought

the three plates of blue and gold, and who told me at the same time that her mother was dead," replied Dorothea.

"Yes, I remember," was his brief answer; "but what about the books you have mentioned?"

"I will tell you," said his wife, only too glad to have a chance of speaking at last of a subject so dear to her heart. And she related to her husband, with the minutest detail, all that Marguerite had told her in the store.

"I earnestly begged the poor child to come back to see me," she said at last, "and to tell Mme. Chabrodié not to send her to the home for abandoned children; but as she has not returned, it is evident that they were in a hurry to get rid of her. This Mme. Chabrodié is a woman of no principle; this is no way of doing, and I even think that she has ill-treated the dear little thing." There was a moment of silence on both sides, each one trying to gain the cause at issue.

"She said I was an honest man?" continued Quesnoy indifferently. "Well, she is greatly mistaken, the poor child."

"How so? What do you mean, Quesnoy?" exclaimed his wife in surprise. "What queer notions you have in your head since you were

sick. If you are not a good man, my dear, I don't know where to find one."

The old man shook his head significantly, and became restless in his chair.

"I would like to see the books she has brought," he said, after a long pause. "To think that she had the idea of confiding them to me, that beautiful little damsel!" And the old man gave a sigh, for he felt unworthy of the simple confidence of the child.

"You are like me—you find it nice on her part, don't you?" continued his wife, "and you only saw her in passing. If you knew how lovely she is! I thought I saw our little Susie. It grieves my heart to think that she was put with the abandoned children. But I will bring you the books, Jerome." She left the room; her husband remained alone ruminating over an idea which had crossed his mind.

"Would I be foolish," he asked himself, "to consider the matter in its different phases? To be sure my wife would be enchanted. I think she would say yes without coaxing if I asked her; I shall, therefore say nothing to her until I am quite decided."

Mme. Quesnoy's return interrupted his meditation. She brought the books; it was an

"Imitation" and a splendid missal with vignettes of great artistic value. The two volumes were bound in purple morocco, with a border and clasps of vermilion.

Quesnoy turned and turned the books before opening them, examining the binding as if to find out how much it might have cost. At last he opened the prayer-book.

"Give me my glasses, wife," he said, "there is something written on the blank page; we will probably learn the name of the child."

"But I know it already," answered Mme. Quesnoy, handing him the glasses; "she told me that her name was Marguerite Albrun; not a difficult name to remember, indeed."

But the name which the old man had some difficulty to decipher, the ink being almost colorless, was not Albrun. At the top of the page were these words written in very fine letters:

"Marguerite de Malbrègue,

From her affectionate mother."

Beneath, there was a date going back twenty years.

"De Malbrègue! De Malbrègue!" said the pensive old man. "I have never known any-

body by that name, as far as I can remember. Have you, my wife?"

"Nor I," replied Mme. Quesnoy, "but as the girl said that the books had belonged to her mother, De Malbrègue must have been her maiden name."

"I tell you one thing, Dorothea," continued Quesnoy, in the tone of a person whose opinion is law, "only people of quality use books like these. I was right, therefore; I was certain when I affirmed that Marguerite's mother was a lady *comme il faut*. As soon as I saw her I recognized her as such. There was in her person a something which only belongs to the *grand monde*."

"Yet, my dear, she must have been very poor," objected his wife. "The girl's dress was worn out and mended. And then, you must confess, that the house of Mme. Chabrodié is the last place where you would look for a lady of quality."

"I do not deny that," replied the old man bluntly. "I did not pretend that she was rich; far from it, poor lady! But I maintained that she belonged by birth to what they call high society. It was a person who evidently has suffered great vicissitudes of fortune."

"The poor woman!" sighed Mme. Quesnoy.

“And to think that her child has to be brought up at the expense of public charity.”

While thus talking, Quesnoy had opened the “Imitation” and glanced over its pages. It was not for the first time that he had a copy of it in his hands; many an old edition of it had passed through his store. He had bought them and sold them without knowing anything of their contents, and even without troubling himself about knowing it. He knew that the ministers of religion recommended the work as most valuable for teaching how to do good and avoid evil.

As he carelessly perused the volume, his eyes fell on a certain passage which went straight to his conscience like an arrow from a sure hand. An involuntary shivering went through his whole frame as he read its sentences. It was a passage bearing on the widow and the orphan, and of the lot awaiting those who wrong the little ones.

“What an extraordinary coincidence!” said Quesnoy to himself, while the memory of the particular sin which had so much disturbed his conscience on his bed of suffering came back with renewed intensity.

One thing was clearly expressed in what he had read: “God is angry with those who are

unjust to the widows, and who rob the orphans." And he was guilty of both. Divine vengeance was suspended over his head.

But he had confessed his guilt and was repentant; he had solemnly promised to compensate the child for the injury done to the mother, and he was going to keep his promise; yes, he was ready to keep it at any cost, since God Himself seemed to command it. He closed the book and gave a loud, deep sigh.

"What is the matter, Jerome? What troubles you? Do you feel worse again?" cried the poor woman, prone to be alarmed.

"Something very serious is the matter, wife," he replied. "What do you think he must do who has committed a great fault?"

"Well, he must try to make reparation, I imagine," said Mme. Quesnoy, surprised to be asked for her opinion. "But what do you mean, Jerome? You do not speak of yourself, do you?"

"Yes, of myself; I have committed a horrible deed, and I want you to help me to make reparation for it."

"What can it be?" stammered Dorothea, with increasing surprise.

"I am thinking of that child," he said, in a tone of voice which betrayed great agitation of

mind. "I have robbed her mother shamefully."

And as Dorothea made a sign of absolute denial, thinking that his mind was wandering again, he continued warmly:

"Yes, I have robbed her, robbed her like a highway robber. Let us call things by their real names. That pitcher of old Sévres which I have bought from her was worth at least five louis, and I only gave her one—only one. You see, wife, I am a miserable thief. She looked to be poor, unfortunate, half-starved; she could scarcely hold herself up, and I had the courage to cheat her! It is mean, it is infamous! Since then I have not had a moment's peace."

Mme. Quesnoy remained silent, her eyes fixed on those of her husband; his words were a revelation to her. Strange to say, till now she had not in the least regretted the "good bargain" which Quesnoy had made to the detriment of Marguerite's mother.

She had always considered it as perfectly natural and licit for her husband to depreciate the articles offered to him, and to get them at the lowest price. Was that not permitted?

Although Mme. Quesnoy in a moment of great suffering had spoken of money with a certain air of contempt, yet she observed the

strictest economy, which indicated disposition of a different kind. She took great interest in her husband's business, and was highly gratified to think that his little capital grew larger every year.

But during the illness of the old antiquarian, her selfish and exclusively material tendencies had been constrained.

The visit of Marguerite, arousing in the soul of Dorothea maternal instincts that had long been dormant, brought out again the better and noble side of her character.

How often has not a child had the power of transforming by its inspiring tenderness the character and the life of a woman!

Such was the case with Dorothea. Light had already begun to dawn in her soul. "It is certain, Jerome, that you have been somewhat hard toward that poor lady," she said at last. "It is strange that I never thought of it before. Poor creature! She must have been in great need of money. Yes, it is a pity you did not give her more. I understand your remorse; if it had been a rich person, it would not be so bad. It is only right to draw as much as possible from a rich man, and you would do no business otherwise; but from a poor widow, it is not right."

"It is never allowed to injure any one, rich or poor," said Quesnoy, whose moral sense had become enlightened by the serious reflections he had made. "But to return to the mother of that little girl, I am ashamed of my conduct. I am repentant of my fault and at present I am asking myself what I can do for the little one."

"O Jerome!" exclaimed his wife, in a transport of enthusiasm, "if you would like it——"

He raised his hand as if to command silence. She stopped.

"Wait a little, my dear," he replied. "Hear first what I have to tell you, then we shall see if we are of the same opinion. Do you know that since my illness I have often, very often, thought of our Susie."

"And so have I, Jerome," interrupted Mme. Quesnoy, with tears in her eyes.

"How long is it since we have lost her? Do you remember?"

Does she remember it? What a question for a mother!

"I should think so, my dear. It will be twenty-one years next February, the fifteenth, at 10 o'clock in the evening," she said with precision.

"So long!" said the old man, with a sigh;

"how years pass by! Susie was nine years old when she died; had she lived, she would now be just thirty. She might be the mother of the little black-eyed darling."

Poor Dorothea was beside herself; not only did she not understand the drift of Quesnoy's thoughts, but she could not picture to herself her child as a woman of mature age; to the mother little Susie had remained, and always will remain, little Susie.

"But let us come to the point," continued Quesnoy, coughing to conceal the embarrassment. "If Susie had died at the age of thirty and had left a child, we would bring it up as our own, would we not? Why, then, not do the same for the little orphan who is nothing to us, it is true, but who deserves to be taken care of, for she is not an ordinary child—she is too nice for that."

"Oh, my dear husband, I understand you now!" exclaimed his wife. "You would like to bring the little one into our house to replace Susie—. But no, this is not what I mean; Susie cannot be replaced; but you think of adopting Marguerite?"

"Well, how would you like it?"

"Nothing could please me more," said Mme. Quesnoy, fondly embracing her husband.

"You know I am passionately fond of children. But you, are you sure you will like it? Do you really speak seriously?"

"Why such a question after all I have said?" answered the old man, somewhat impatiently.

"Well, because I have often heard you say, and it grieved my heart, that it was most fortunate we had no children to run round in the store and break your porcelains."

"Did I really say that?" asked the antiquarian; "I do not remember it, but it is possible. Well, let us hope that the little darling will break nothing. We can take her on trial, and if in a week or two we see that it will not do, we shall send her back. Well, why do you weep, my dear?"

"I weep for joy," said Dorothea, wiping the tears from her eyes. "You have had a good thought, and I do not think you will ever be sorry for it. But we have not a moment to lose; it is over two weeks since the child has been here. I fear that this good-for-nothing Mme. Chabrodié has already sent her off and put her into some asylum. If you are not afraid to be alone for a few moments, I will go and find out where the child is."

"Go, make haste," responded the old man;

“when a thing is decided, it is best to do it at once.”

In a few moments Mme. Quesnoy had put on hat and shawl; she had recovered her juvenile agility.

When she had closed the door behind her, the old merchant, stirring his fire, began to reflect on the decision he had taken in too great a hurry, perhaps. Was it not absurd, hasty, foolish? A few weeks ago he would have been incapable of committing such an act. And yet the old man could not bring himself to regret his decision. Quite the contrary; he felt an interior satisfaction which he had never experienced before. Waiting for the return of his wife much longer than the few moments of which she had spoken, he felt as much impatience to see the little orphan come to his house as he formerly did to become the happy owner of some *faïence* of Venice, or of some vase of Chinese porcelain. He was himself surprised at his extraordinary sprightliness.

Thus, Jerome Quesnoy commenced to keep his promises. He had made a vow on his sick bed that if he should recover he would become a different man. He already felt the change. He did not know the theory of com-

mencing a new life, but he had taken the right direction; he was walking on the road to light. He crept out of his selfishness, out of that miserable *ego* which is the plague of our society.

He advanced only step by step, it is true, and with timidity, yet he already felt a thousand times happier than when he was incarcerated in the narrow prison-cell of his petty interests and complete indifference to all that was not self.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLAN IS CARRIED OUT.

THE old antiquarian commenced to feel seriously alarmed at the prolonged absence of his wife.

What could keep her so long? It was but a few moments' walk to Mme. Chabrodié's; evidently she must have gone somewhere else.

At last he hears a carriage stop at the door, and in a few moments Dorothea appears all radiant with joy, and triumphantly carrying in her arms something like an enormous bundle.

"I have her, my dear, I have her, and not

without trouble!" she exclaimed, putting down gently her burden on the carpet before the warm fire-place.

"I shall return presently," she added. "I have only to settle with the driver."

The bundle began to move; a tiny white hand tried to lift up the shawl, and when it had partly succeeded, Jerome Quesnoy saw two large eyes sternly peep at him.

"Well, my little darling, how do you feel?" he said, leaning toward the young face with those beautiful black eyes.

The child smiled faintly, but did not dare to answer.

Then Quesnoy noticed how much she had changed; her emaciation was painful to behold; her eyes were dim and heavy-looking.

At that moment Mme. Quesnoy, lively and gay as she had not been for a long time, came back to the room.

Her husband eagerly asked her in a low voice: "What in the world has happened to that child? She looks to be very sick."

"Yes, the poor darling is sick," answered Mme. Quesnoy indignantly, "and if you had seen in what condition I found her, you would be surprised to see her alive at all. Imagine, Jerome, she was lying in a garret, a horrible

black hole where the wind blew in from all sides through the roof. It was cold enough there to freeze her very bones. As for the dirtiness of the place, it is simply incredible; there were at least four inches of dust on the floor. The poor creature had only a heap of rags to sleep on, and for covering a piece of blanket as thin as a cobweb; the sheets I will not mention.

“Mme. de Chabrodié asserts that the child took sick about two weeks ago, but nothing will make me desist from the belief that she made her slowly die of hunger. I had to get a carriage to bring her here; she was not able to walk a step, and I did not feel strong enough to carry her even that little distance.”

Then approaching the child she said: “Well, darling, take courage! I am going to get some soup for you; that will give you strength.”

She had soon warmed a cup of excellent broth which had been prepared for her husband. Taking the child on her lap she gave her spoonful after spoonful of that warm and nourishing beverage. Old Quesnoy, reclining in his arm-chair, watched the touching scene with the liveliest interest.

To the great satisfaction of both, Margue-

rite did not refuse to take nourishment; on the contrary, she evidently relished it. When she had finished her little meal, she tried to sit up and look around, but she was too feeble, and her tired head fell back on Mme. Quesnoy's bosom.

"Poor little darling!" murmured the old man with the most tender emotion.

"How fortunate that I went for her this evening, Jerome," said his wife; "it was high time. I really believe that Mme. Chabrodié had forgotten the very existence of the child, and had not given her a morsel to eat all day. Besides, she had taken too much drink, as usual, and was thundering in the most horrible language against the little beggars left to her charge."

At the mention of Mme. de Chabrodié's name Marguerite opened her eyes; an expression of fright was visible on her face.

"Oh, do not send me back to her, I entreat you!" she said suppliantly. "Do not send me back!"

"No, no, darling; don't be alarmed," answered Mme. Quesnoy, pressing her still closer to her heart. "You will never again see that monster of a woman, if I can help it. Look here, Jerome," she said, turning to her hus-

band, "how thin she is, the poor little thing."

"She had nothing to spare," replied the old merchant, remembering that painful expression which had attracted his attention the first time he saw the child.

"No matter. I hope she needs nothing but good nourishment, care, and caressing."

"That she will have," answered the antiquarian, smiling at his happy wife.

"She will, indeed," said the old lady, caressing the curls of the little brunette. "Now I will take her to our room and put her into a good warm bed."

Marguerite was taken with unspeakable contentment into the arms of her new friend, who pressed her once more with maternal tenderness to her heart, and then carried her upstairs.

When Jerome Quesnoy followed, half an hour later, he found Marguerite peacefully asleep in the bed which Susie had formerly occupied. It looked as if old times had come again. The old man stood still under the spell of a strange emotion; it seemed to him as if he had all at once grown twenty years younger.

"Come, look at her, Jerome," said his wife,

in a low voice, "she is so lovely, despite her emaciation!"

In fact, the intelligent care of Mme. Quesnoy had already produced satisfactory results. Marguerite seemed to be better. She had scarcely laid her head on the soft white pillow when she fell asleep with a smile on her lips that revealed the joy of her heart.

The more Quesnoy looked at her, the more his heart became oppressed, and although he boasted of being a freethinker, tears came to his eyes.

"Does it not seem as if Susie had come back to us?" he said, with a husky voice.

"Not quite," replied his wife, who, although happy at present, was still jealous of the memory of the dear departed one; "but in remembrance of our own darling we will be kind to this little orphan, will we not, Jerome?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, and his words were the true expression of his thoughts.

Mme. Quesnoy was right in saying that Marguerite only needed rest, care, and affection. Badly nourished, ill-treated, and in constant fear of punishment, the poor child had fallen into a kind of marasmus which would soon have carried her off.

"I am very glad to be here," said Mar-

guerite next day, while M. and Mme. Quesnoy, standing at her bedside, watched her with considerable interest as she took her milk and bread for breakfast.

"Yes, I am very glad to be here," she repeated with charming ingenuity. "I believe, Mme. Quesnoy, that it was God who sent you after me. I prayed to Him every day, but I had commenced to fear He had forgotten me, for I was all alone and miserable; yet, you see, He has remembered me at last, since He has sent you to me."

"Yes, my darling, and you need not fear that you will feel want with us," answered Mme. Quesnoy, who, not understanding that infantile profession of faith, became more and more convinced that after her own Susie, Marguerite was the most marvellous child that ever existed.

Quesnoy said nothing, but drooped his head with profound humiliation. He learned from that little orphan how empty had been his past life without faith, without prayer, without God. Even the abandoned child was happier than he.

It was a pleasure to see Marguerite return to life again, so to say, under the genial influence of the sun of goodness and affection.

After three days she was able to run through the whole house as if she never had done anything else, and although her face still showed some traces of fatigue, it was radiant and full of life.

Owing to that happy mobility of impression which is characteristic of childhood, the little girl had already forgotten the bitter days she had experienced and gave herself up entirely to the enjoyment of her present happiness.

Christmas had come. Jerome Quesnoy had gone down to the store very early. Not expecting to do much business on that day, he intended to put his porcelains in order.

It was a glorious morning. The church-bells were ringing merrily and the streets were filled with people in festive attire going to attend divine service.

Suddenly Mme. Quesnoy opened the door; she seemed to be quite agitated, and with her forefinger on her lips, as if to command silence, she said in a very low voice: "O Jerome, I wish you would hear our little one. She is singing so sweetly the same words which our Susie used to sing. I do not remember where she had learned them."

"Indeed!" And the old man went cautiously to the door to listen.

Marguerite was in the back room. Mme. Quesnoy had given her a dear relic—a doll which had belonged to Susie. The child was delighted with her present; she still had the doll on her lap, but without looking at it; her big eyes seemed to roam pensively in space, while she sang like an angel:

“Jerusalem, my happy home,
How do I sigh for thee!
When shall my exile have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?”

An hour later, Mme. Quesnoy, leading Marguerite by the hand, was on her way to a church in the middle of the avenue which Mme. Albrun had followed on the last evening of her life. The little girl remembered it and she spoke touchingly of that sad walk, and of her dear mamma always present to her memory.

“She is now in that happy Jerusalem of which I have been singing this morning,” said the child, lifting her eyes toward heaven. “I felt like singing. As this is a feast-day on earth, it must be a still greater one in heaven. She is happy, no doubt, my dear mother, and thinks of me as I think of her.”

After breakfast Jerome Quesnoy went back to the store, but he did not stay there long.

His treasure was not there. The little orphan had become the centre of his affections. It was his delight to watch her cunning looks and graceful manners. His admiration was only equalled by his tender love for her. Frequently he would whisper to his wife:

“Did you notice what pretty little feet Marguerite has? They belong to the aristocracy only, do you know?”

Or again:

“Look at her thin fingers and tiny ears; really they are like shells of rose-leaves. Indeed, that child is like a beautiful piece of Sèvres porcelain. She is of fine quality, or else I am no judge.”

Mme. Quesnoy smiled at her husband's enthusiasm; but at heart she was not less proud of the little adopted child than he.

There was another reason for astonishment. Marguerite was a perfect reader. Mme. Albrun had taken great pains to teach her little girl how to read well. Marguerite pronounced every syllable clearly and correctly; moreover, she read with so much feeling and natural expression that it was a pleasure to listen to her.

Jerome Quesnoy did not know much about books. Since he had commenced business, he only read some special works on ceramic art,

putting aside all other books as idle stories, unworthy of the attention of an antiquarian of his superiority.

Marguerite took one of her mother's books, those cherished books, which she kissed with reverence on seeing them again. Unlike so many little girls who make a face when they are told to read a serious book, she opened the "Imitation" and read one of her favorite passages. "And now," said Marguerite, closing the book, "would you like to hear me recite what mamma has taught me, and what she liked so much?"

"Very much indeed, darling," answered the good lady, almost in ecstasy.

Then with a fresh, clear voice, the little orphan recited one of Lamartine's sweetest odes.

When she had finished she looked with surprise at her silent adoptive parents.

"Don't you like that?" she asked, somewhat disappointed.

"Indeed, it is most beautiful, my dear," answered Dorothea, who admired more than she could understand.

"What is the meaning of that last verse," asked Quesnoy, in order to convince himself that the child knew the meaning of what she had recited, "'To breathe in our true abode?'"

"The abode is heaven!" exclaimed Marguerite, without hesitation.

"Heaven?" repeated the old man, "where is heaven?"

A radiant smile illumined the face of the child; she clasped her hands with fervor and her eyes looked up instinctively:

"Heaven," she said, with profound respect, "is the dwelling of God and of those who have loved Him on earth. It is that 'beautiful home' of the hymn which I like so much.

"Mamma is in heaven, I am sure, and do you know, Mme. Quesnoy, I think that your dear Susie, of whom you have told me such beautiful things, must be there also."

"It is quite possible," said Dorothea, trying to conceal her tears. The old man, likewise, was more moved than he would have liked to admit.

The festive day was thus spent in joy and happiness, and to all it seemed that it had been of too short duration. It was late when Mme. Quesnoy and Marguerite went to their sleeping room, while Jerome remained sitting near the fire, humming again and again:

"Jerusalem, my happy home."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POTTER'S ART.

“YOUR porcelains are dusty, M. Quesnoy,” said Marguerite, on entering the store next morning; “why do you not clean them?”

“For three reasons, my dear,” answered the old man, with a benevolent smile. “First, because it would take more time than I can spare; then, because I would run the risk of breaking them, which I do not like; lastly, because my articles are changing so often that it is not worth while cleaning them.”

“Mamma would not have liked to see anything dirty in our house!” remarked the child. “I am very good at cleaning. I always had to help to keep everything in good order, and if you wish, I shall keep all this nice and clean for you.”

“No, no, my little lady, many thanks,” answered the merchant, smiling. “Better let well enough alone, says the proverb. You are one of your sex; you like to clean and to move things around; but I would not like to trust my precious porcelains to such tiny little fingers.”

"I would have been careful not to break anything; mamma said that I was not awkward," replied Marguerite, somewhat mortified at the refusal of her offer.

Suddenly she gave a shout of joy. She had seen the pitcher of old Sèvres which Quesnoy had conspicuously placed on the edge of the window-sill.

"Oh, what happiness! There is mamma's pitcher!" she exclaimed.

And before Quesnoy had time to notice what she was doing, she had it in her hands and touched it with her lips. "How full of dust!" she continued, looking fondly at the pictures. "What a pity! Let me dust it, I beg you, M. Quesnoy; I know how mamma used to clean it."

"Well, let us see," answered her old friend; "go, ask grandmamma for a piece of linen."

Marguerite ran off like a young deer. In an instant she returned with a dusting-rag, an air of consequence on her face.

"Be very careful," said M. Quesnoy, who was not without uneasiness while the pitcher was in the girl's hands. "It is a beautiful piece, worth a great deal of money," he said.

"Indeed! How much?" said Marguerite, with interested curiosity.

The old merchant turned his head aside

without giving an answer. How awkward! Once more the bright looks of the child brought the blush of shame to his face.

"Mamma did not want to sell it," continued the little girl, without noticing that Quesnoy did not answer her question.

Silence again.

"She loved it dearly, because she had it from her mother; but as she had no money, she was glad you bought it from her. She called you an honest man."

"She was greatly mistaken," said Quesnoy bluntly.

The child looked amazed; she would not believe her ears.

"What," she said timidly, "you are not an honest man, M. Quesnoy?"

"No, no, far from it," he replied energetically.

There was a moment of silence; Marguerite seemed to be ill at ease.

"But you wish to be honest?" she continued, lowering her voice. "Mamma said that nobody can boast of being good; it would be wrong to think that we are good. God only wants us to try to become so. You will try to, will you not?"

"Yes, certainly. For some time I have had

a strong desire to be good," said Quesnoy, more to himself than to his little questioner, whose whole attention was again centred on the pitcher which she was cleaning with the utmost care.

"It is done!" she exclaimed, after a few minutes. "See, M. Quesnoy, does it not look better now that it is clean?"

"Yes, indeed," said the old man; "you have put it in tip-top condition. Now take it back to its place and be careful to set it straight."

"Will you allow me to dust it every day?" Marguerite asked, placing the precious vase on the same spot where she had found it.

"Yes, if you always do it with the same care," answered Quesnoy.

From that day Marguerite's first visit in the store was to her "old friend," as she called the pitcher. It was always with pleasure, nay, with a sort of pride, that she acquitted herself of her voluntarily assumed task, for the pitcher was to her of as much value as to the old dealer, only for a different reason.

Marguerite used to spend several hours a day in the store, and Quesnoy found in her such an intelligent and agreeable companion that he became more and more attached to her; he, who formerly dreaded the presence

of a child in his "sanctuary," felt unhappy when she was not near him. She had to call him "grandpapa," and he cherished her as if she had been his little granddaughter. This mutual affection was still more cemented by an interest common to both.

"Grandpapa," said Marguerite one day, coming home from school, "the teacher has told us that you are well versed in ceramic art. Will you explain to me what that means, if you please?"

"Ceramic is the common name given to the different kinds of artistic *faïence*, pottery, and porcelain."

"Oh, yes, I understand. You are indeed well informed, knowing everything as you do," answered the little girl.

"No, not everything," objected Quesnoy, pleased, however, with the homage paid to his learning.

"Not everything, but certainly many things. I have heard you give all kinds of names to porcelain. Where was porcelain first made, grandpapa?"

"Many countries claim this honor, and for that reason there are so many different kinds of it. But that is of no interest to you, darling; you had better go and play with dolly."

"Pardon me, grandpapa ; it interests me very much. For a long time I have been anxious to learn something about porcelain. Tell me all you know about it," said Marguerite, caressing the old man, who always gratified her wishes under such circumstances.

"The history of ceramic art is a long one, as it dates back to the remotest antiquity. The oldest peoples had pottery, or baked clay of which they made pots as the women still do in Algeria. These pots were first used in religious ceremonies, hence the idea of decorating them, roughly it is true, yet with comparative taste ; afterward they were used for domestic purposes."

"By whom, grandpapa? By the French?"

"No, darling ; by the Chinese, who are considered to be the first makers of all kinds of pottery. They made it over 4,500 years ago."

"And when did they commence to make porcelain?"

"Oh, long before our era ; two hundred years before."

"And from whom did the Japanese learn it?"

"Probably from the Chinese. I will tell you an amusing story relating to that fact. The introduction of this wonderful art led the

inhabitants of a certain island, called Maury-Ga-Sima, or island of Maury, to become puffed up with pride. Their island was extremely fertile, and among other natural treasures, it yielded admirable clay for the manufacturing of *murrhin* vases, which we now call porcelain vases. This was an immense source of revenue for the islanders, who surpassed all others in the art of pottery. Their work was eagerly sought for and brought its weight in gold. These people could, therefore, enjoy every luxury, which is only too often a misfortune for man. Their vices and their contempt of religion aroused the anger of the gods, who resolved to submerge Maury-Ga-Sima. The king of the island, called *Peiruun*, I believe, was the only virtuous and honest man; the gods loved him, and in a dream warned him to quit the island as soon as he would see the faces of the idols at the entrance to the temple turn red. The king immediately made known to his subjects the danger which threatened the island and the catastrophe which was to befall it; but they all laughed at his credulity.

“A sorry jester one night took it into his head, in order to ridicule the king’s admonitions, to daub the faces of the two idols. *Peiruun* noticed it and at once took to flight in

his galleys with all his household. He had not yet reached China when the whole island disappeared, burying in the deep the jester and all those who had made light of the king's admonition, together with all the precious vases amassed in the factories."

"Oh, grandpapa, did that really happen?"

"I do not know, child; all I can say is that the island once existed, that at low tide there are vestiges of it to be seen, and that divers are engaged in the difficult work of recovering the submerged *murrhins*. On account of a thick layer of shells, to which they have become attached, it is not easy to distinguish them, and it is also hard to loosen them; for they stick to these shells as if soldered on."

"What do they do with them, grandpapa?"

"They are cleaned, but some of that layer is left untouched, so as to attest their antiquity, which makes them very precious."

"Have you not one to show me?" asked the little girl, casting at the same time an investigating look all around the store.

"What do you think! Those vases are extremely rare and it would take more than your grandpapa's pennies to buy one of them. They are worth three times their weight in gold."

Marguerite listened with delight.

"And then?" she asked.

"And then? What do you mean?"

"Continue; this is so interesting. So the porcelains of China and Japan are the oldest. But who brought them to France?"

"The Dutch; after the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope by Vasco di Gama; these people were the first to establish commercial relations with the extreme east. They introduced into Europe vases of porcelain which at first were only to be seen on the tables of kings and princes of royal blood.

"Next Thursday, darling, should the weather be fine, we shall ask grandmamma to accompany us to Sèvres, where you will see how they make a snow-white paste to which they give any shape or ornament they may fancy, and then bake it for some time in an oven. You will then be much wiser than the grand seigneurs in the time of Francis I.

"Those big lords, who admired very much the new kind of table utensils, had the strangest notions concerning their origin. I will only give you one instance. A real scientist, by the name of Pancerole, discovered that porcelain was made of a mixture of plaster, sea-shells, and the white of eggs, the whole to

be buried in the ground eighty years before it could be used."

Marguerite laughed heartily.

"And do you not believe, grandpapa, that I prefer listening to your stories to playing with my doll?" she asked the old man, again caressing him fondly. "Tell me some more."

M. Quesnoy smiled.

"Well, as it amuses you so much, I will tell you how the clay for making porcelain was discovered. They had found out that porcelain was only a finer kind of pottery than that already known, and they tried to imitate it; but they could not find the exact clay for it. Do you remember how often you have seen in your picture-books the great seigneurs with enormous powdered wigs?"

"Yes, grandpapa."

"A quantity of powder was needed for these wigs; wheaten flour was used, but it was too dear. They tried to find something cheaper. One day, a master blacksmith, passing near d'Auc, in Saxony, noticed that the hoofs of his horse were sinking into a white clay of striking quality. He took a certain quantity of it, dried it, and used it as wig-powder. The trial proved to be a success, and the new powder soon became the fashion. There lived

then in Saxony a man named Boettiger, who was bent on finding out the means of imitating the beautiful porcelains of China and of Japan. One day he noticed that his wig was unusually heavy; he asked his servant what was the reason of it; the servant said that the new powder was somewhat heavy, indeed, and he showed it to his master. Boettiger experimented with the powder, which was no other than kaolin or porcelain-clay, and found the long-wished-for secret."

"O grandpapa, that is not all!" exclaimed Marguerite, when Quesnoy arose and put on his glasses as if about to resume his work in the store.

"Well, well, you are insatiable; have patience!" exclaimed the antiquarian with a smile. "It was also by mere chance that that precious clay was discovered in France. In olden times people were poorer than nowadays, and therefore more economical. The wife of a surgeon of Saint-Yrieix, Mme. Darnet, found that she spent too much money on soap; she studied how to replace it by something else. One day as she was out walking she found a white, fatty clay of a peculiar nature. 'I have found it!' she exclaimed, and immediately she took some of it home to use it instead of soap.

“Rejoicing at her discovery she showed it to her husband, who recognized it as the precious substance which is looked for everywhere; it is even superior to the kaolin of Saxony, as it contained two ingredients instead of one.”

“What good luck, grandpapa! How I would like to make discoveries like that lady!”

“Do as she did, darling; keep your two eyes wide open and do not go about like a mole.”

At that moment Mme. Quesnoy, who was surprised not to see her little companion make her appearance, came to the store to look for her, and the conversation stopped.

But Marguerite was very fond of chatting with the old man, and Quesnoy, generally taciturn, was quite eloquent on the one topic of his predilection.

At the first opportunity the little girl, who had classified in her head all he had told her, began thus:

“You have spoken to me of porcelain of China and Japan; what fine porcelains are there besides?”

“That of Sèvres,” answered Quesnoy proudly.

“Are those of Saxony and England equally old?”

“No, darling.”

"Then the names of their inventors are known? I understand that you cannot tell me the name of the discoverer of China porcelain, it is so very old. But perhaps you know the names of the discoverers of other kinds of porcelain?"

"The first factory of porcelain in France was erected by a man named Morin. It was established at St. Cloud in 1695; the works at Sèvres, of which the king was the sole proprietor, opened only in 1756. Beautiful articles were made there, but were of soft paste and could not be utilized for every-day purposes. It was only after Mme. Darnet's discovery in 1760, that hard, resisting porcelain, like that of your pitcher, for instance, could be produced."

"And the porcelain of Saxony?"

"I have told you the name of its discoverer; it was the celebrated Boettiger, who had a remarkable history."

Marguerite's eyes sparkled with impatience at the word history, and Quesnoy at once gratified her curiosity.

"Over two hundred years ago," he said, "there was born at Schleiz, in the bailiwick of Rens, in Germany, a little boy called Frederic Boettiger. From his very infancy he showed

a lively imagination and often mistook his desires for realities. Being very poor, he wished to be rich. At that time it was believed that by boiling a mixture of all sorts of abominable things, gold could be produced. They called it searching for the philosopher's stone.

"Frederic thought it was possible to find it. He determined to become apprentice to an apothecary in Berlin, where he would have everything necessary for his experiments. How many nights he spent in his laboratory no one knows; but one day it was announced that he had succeeded and was making gold.

"Immediately he was accused of being a sorcerer, and as such was to be burnt alive. He barely had time to make his escape. He went to Saxony, trumpeting out the news of his great discovery, although the stake awaited those who had found the secret.

"There was in Saxony a certain prince, an elector, who always needed more money than he possessed. He heard of the fugitive and called him to his palace in Dresden.

"There he asked him if he really knew how to make gold. Thus driven to the wall, the poor fellow answered no. But the prince did not believe him, and in order to prevent the escape of so precious a man, he gave orders to

seize him and bring him to the port of Keenigstein, where he was guarded day and night like a princess in the Arabian tales. The best of everything was given to him, but on condition that he would one day pay his debts with gold made in his crucible.

“Nearly three years had elapsed. Boettiger was wearied to death; the elector’s anger knew no bounds; and after having been at the point of death for knowing, as they said, how to make gold, the ex-apothecary was now in danger of death for *not* knowing how to make it.

“It was at that time, probably while looking for some distraction in his solitude, that Boettiger put the powder of his wig into the crucible and found the composition of a valuable kind of porcelain. Now things took a wonderful turn. He told the elector that he had fulfilled his mission, having found the means of replenishing his coffers, and he proved it so clearly that the prince consented to set him free.

“He established in the Castle of Meisson, on the banks of the Elbe, not far from Dresden, a factory which opened to Saxony a source of immense riches.”

“Thank you, grandpapa. And the English porcelain?”

“It is not so old. The man that first made it had also many a thorny road to traverse, but that is the lot of most great men. They only arrive at glory after having been torn and wounded by the briars of the rough path of life.”

“Do you know his history?” asked Marguerite, who did not allow him to make any digressions.

“Do I know it! I should think so. His name was Josiah Wedgwood; he was born in 1730, and was the thirteenth child of respectable parents. His father was an unpretentious potter at Burslem, in Staffordshire, who needed all the help he could get from his sons. Unfortunately this worthy man died when Josiah was still very young, and at the age of eleven he stood, so to say, all alone in the world, every member of the family having enough to do to provide for himself.

“He had become a turner in a workshop presided over by his oldest brother, and earned enough to make a fair living, when he was stricken with small-pox which then was much more dangerous than after the discovery of vaccination. He had a protracted illness, during which there developed on his right leg a tumor which necessitated the amputation of the limb.

“Working any longer at his trade of turner was out of the question, and he was in great embarrassment. With all his energy and good will he was scarcely able to make a living. He still fondly thought of the dear pottery which he regretted he had ever left. When a man keeps one object constantly in view he will sooner or later find the opportunity of obtaining it.

“Poor Josiah, although a cripple, found ways and means to exercise his wonderful skill and talent. He commenced on a very small scale, in a poorly thatched cabin, but whatever article came out of it had its value; it was made with taste. He produced artistic pottery which found such profitable sale that in a few years he could build three factories. Always endeavoring to excel, he also discovered a sort of clay of which he made a cream-colored porcelain such as never had been seen before. It was admired. Wedgwood presented a few pieces to Queen Charlotte, who immediately gave orders for a whole service. He had now made a fortune. He was all the fashion, and the title of ‘potter to the crown’ was bestowed on him. He opened a store in London to exhibit his wonderful productions; he himself worked like the lowest of his assistants, for he had but

one end in view: to reach perfection. He found the secret of producing a kind of pottery made by the Etruscans: a secret which had been lost since the time of Pliny. Finally he manufactured a substance more resisting than bronze, of which he made cameos harder than the one you see here."

"O grandpapa, is it possible that a poor unfortunate boy should have made such beautiful things?"

"Certainly, darling; he has done more. By energy and talent he had no doubt acquired great riches; but what good did he not do to his country! He employed twenty thousand workmen whose prosperity was due to his industry, and he loaded whole vessels with his products."

"But they are not as nice as those of Sèvres," said Marguerite, caressing with her looks the pitcher which to her eyes was the favorite type of everything beautiful.

"There can be no comparison between the two," answered the old man; "the products of Sèvres are works of pure art; those of Josiah's combined art and usefulness. They exhibit the characteristic feature of the Englishman's practical sense."

CHAPTER IX.

MARGUERITE MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

MARGUERITE was plunged in a sort of philosophical meditation on the meaning of *practical sense*, and M. Quesnoy was commencing to doctor up with his mastic and brushes a fractured vase, when a cab drove up to the door. A gentleman came out first, and then helped a lady to alight.

"Here is Dr. Belfonds," said Quesnoy, setting back his spectacles on his forehead, and looking out through the window.

A few moments later the doctor and Hortense Malbrègue entered the store.

"How do you do, M. Quesnoy?" said Gabriel Belfonds gaily, and with a cordial handshake, "I am glad to see you are quite yourself again." And when the antiquarian had spoken a few words regarding his health, M. Belfonds added:

"I did not come to pay you an official visit as physician to-day; I come as an amateur and as the companion of mademoiselle, who wishes to see your curiosities; I have praised them

very highly and have told her that you would be glad to show them to her."

"Indeed," answered the antiquarian, "you are welcome, mademoiselle; I am always happy and proud to show what I have, even to those who do not wish to buy. What I have to show is not much," he added, with conceited modesty; "a few rare articles, that is all. Walk cautiously, please, mademoiselle; we have little spare room here."

"And who is that charming little person, M. Quesnoy?" asked the doctor, looking at Marguerite, who contemplated in silent admiration the beautiful dress, and especially the handsome face of Hortense Malbrègue. "I did not know that you had a child here."

"It is my granddaughter," answered the old man briefly. "She has lost her parents, and we have adopted her."

"Ah, indeed!" said M. Belfonds, caressing the curly head of the child. "You will find in her an agreeable companion and so will Mme. Quesnoy, who sometimes felt very lonesome."

Here we must remark that the old antiquarian had made up his mind always to answer all questions concerning Marguerite in the same way as he answered the doctor.

“Why should he enter into so many details?” he said to himself. “I have adopted the child and there can be no harm in making people believe that she is really my granddaughter; this will save trouble both to us and to the child.” Always most reticent on the subject of her private life, he was naturally still more silent on the circumstances which had induced him to adopt the orphan. Mme. Chabrodié might perhaps not be quite as discreet, and tell all she knew concerning the little girl; but then it was not probable that the rich and aristocratic customers of M. Quesnoy would meet a woman of such low standing and gather news from her.

“What a delightful child!” said Mlle. Malbrègue, turning aside from an enamelled picture which Quesnoy showed her, to look at Marguerite. “What splendid eyes! How fiery and yet so velvety!”

These words were addressed to Dr. Belfonds, and just as Hortense pronounced them her future husband was admiring, not for the first time, the beauty of her own eyes which, in his opinion, seemed to be without any rival. While making this remark he looked at the child, and he was suddenly struck with a certain resemblance between her and Marguerite.

Both had elongated, almond-shaped, black, brilliant, velvety eyes; but while the eyes of the child had a serious expression, those of the young lady glittered with sprightly malice.

Marguerite's face expanded and her heart was beating vehemently when Mlle. Malbrègue approached her closely, addressed some affectionate words to her, and imprinted a kiss on her forehead. Overwhelmed by this unexpected mark of friendship, she followed Hortense step by step while she advanced cautiously between piles of porcelain, examining the various objects with that lively and perspicacious interest of a person gifted in a high degree with artistic judgment. Seeing whom he had to deal with, old Quesnoy became eloquent, and gave to the young lady most interesting details on the articles pointed out to her attention. Dr. Belfonds and his cousin selected a few plates of old *faïence* to adorn the walls of their future salons, then the young couple said good-by to the old merchant and to his granddaughter and stepped into their carriage.

"Is she not charming, grandpapa?" exclaimed Marguerite, as soon as they had left, while her eyes still followed the object of her admiration.

"Come in, you will take cold," answered the old man prudently.

"I have never seen such a beautiful lady," continued Marguerite, in her enthusiasm, "and she has such a sweet voice! I am so happy she kissed me!"

"The proverb is always true," murmured the old man. "'Birds of a feather flock together.' The little one is of a great family, and she loves great people."

Madame Quesnoy entered.

"If I am not mistaken, Dorothea, we shall soon hear of the wedding of our doctor," said the antiquarian, rubbing his hands with an expression of satisfaction.

"What! with that beautiful lady?" asked Marguerite, "what makes you think so, grand-papa?"

The eyes of the old man glittered roguishly from under his big gold-mounted spectacles.

"A good many things, darling," he answered, wagging his head.

A fortnight after M. Quesnoy's suppositions were verified. One morning, as he passed by the Church of St. Philip du Roule, he noticed that the steps leading up to the center aisle were covered with red carpet and the bells were pouring forth their most joyous tones. At the

same time his attention was attracted by a long row of carriages which by some accident had come to a standstill. He asked what ceremony had taken place, and the answer received was that Dr. Belfonds had been married to the daughter of General Malbrègue.

"The daughter of General Malbrègue?" repeated Quesnoy; "and who is this general?"

"What!" they said; "you have never heard of the old general who has two or three hotels in this neighborhood.

"No, I have never heard of him," said Quesnoy; "but I am well acquainted with the doctor, and I think I have seen the lady whom he has married."

"Well, I wish them happiness and prosperity. Dr. Belfonds is a good man. I shall never forget with what care and attention he has treated me during my long illness."

Returning home, Jerome Quesnoy said to himself, somewhat disturbed: "Malbrègue! Malbrègue! where in the world have I seen that name? How strange! Is it not the name written in the books of my little girl? Upon my word, it is. I wonder if the spelling is the same? I should have inquired—but what for? After all, they have nothing in common with each other."

Jerome Quesnoy had contracted the habit of calling Marguerite only his little darling. She grew dearer and dearer to him. He considered her as his most precious acquisition. On the other hand, Mme. Quesnoy loved her as she had loved Susie. With that orphan a ray of light, of cheerfulness, of joy and hope had brightened up the dwelling of the old couple.

The gloomy expression which sometimes darkened the face of Dorothea had entirely disappeared. Always taken up with the child, she worked with an activity of which she would not have believed herself capable some months ago.

Quesnoy was always happy in the midst of his old treasures, especially since he had trained Marguerite to share this happiness with him; but his life was now no longer exclusively absorbed by his business.

When spring brought back its balmy days he often closed his store at an early hour to take a walk with his wife and the little darling to the groves around Paris. It would have been difficult to say who of the three enjoyed these walks most—Marguerite, who never grew tired of admiring the large trees, through which were playfully peeping the rays of the sun, or of finding under the new grass the

flowery treasures of spring, lilies of the valley, violets, and anemones, with which she made most tasteful bouquets; or her adoptive parents, enchanted to see her so happy and healthy-looking during this wholesome outdoor exercise.

On Sundays Mme. Quesnoy and Marguerite invariably went together to High Mass. Jerome did not accompany them, but he did not hinder them from going. He even listened with pleasure to what the little girl narrated with child-like simplicity after returning from church. Almost every evening Marguerite recited some of the beautiful pieces of poetry which her mother had taught her, or read aloud one or two pages of the "Imitation." Thus the old man learned by degrees from the mouth of a child the principles of religion, and began to love what had been formerly an object of hatred to him,

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD PITCHER IS SOLD.

IT was again near Christmas time; a year had not yet elapsed since the Quesnoys had adopted the little orphan, and yet it seemed to them as if she had always been their own.

On a cold afternoon the old merchant was alone in a corner of his store when a customer whom he had never seen before entered. It was a man of tall stature, majestic carriage and martial look, with gray hair and beard. His countenance was severe, but a disdainful and almost arrogant look marred the *ensemble*. You have guessed it; it was General Malbrègue. Although keeping up his military gait, the general commenced to feel the weight of his age; not only did he grow old, but, as is often the case, a certain emptiness surrounded him. He suffered from being isolated, he also was attacked by that terrible malady which befalls those who have led a very active life and are condemned to inaction, loneliness, torturing loneliness!

Since the marriage of his daughter his magnificent house seemed to him like a grave; the

spacious and richly-furnished apartments were deserted, silent and mournful. His two sons who had, like their father, embraced the military career, came only at long intervals to spend their furlough with him.

The general knew that the house of his daughter was always open to him, but he did not wish to be indiscreet and to annoy his son-in-law by too frequent visits. Besides, Mme. Belfonds was too much taken up by the whirl of high life to find much time to give to her father.

As the general was sadly winding his way home that day, having vainly waited for the return of his daughter, who had promised to meet him at her house at four o'clock, most harassing thoughts occupied his mind. The weather was gloomy, and had, no doubt, some influence on his moral disposition; his reflections also were gloomy. As he walked along he was thinking how very dull and monotonous his present life was, when suddenly his eyes fell on an object which brought back to him, as by a charm, the happiest days of his life.

He was in front of Quesnoy's old curiosity shop, and one of the objects in the show-window attracted his attention. The pitcher of old Sèvres always occupied the place of honor

on the edge of the window-sill. Its appearance seemed to be familiar to the general. Yes, the more he looked at it the more he found that it resembled a certain pitcher which had belonged to his first wife, and a radiant vision of the most tender reminiscences sprung up before his mind. At that time his life had always been calm and happy; when returning in the evening a pure and serene face greeted him with a smile—his guardian angel was there. Ah! old pitcher, what a wizard thou art! It was a family souvenir which had been given to Mme. Malbrègue and which she appreciated very highly. The general had seen it for years in his wife's parlor near the beautiful cups of Chinese porcelain. After the death of Mme. Malbrègue he had authorized his daughter, Marguerite, to consider those objects as belonging to her, and when the imprudent young lady left the paternal house she thought she had a right to remove them from the parlor and take them away with her.

It is easy to understand the general's feelings at the sight of that pitcher. The memory of his daughter naturally came also to his mind; he had loved her and forgotten her. Forgotten? Do you believe it? Can a father's heart forget?

He had tried to do so, and everybody thought he had succeeded because he never spoke of her; but in reality the memory of Marguerite had always remained in his heart like a bleeding wound. More than ever this souvenir had haunted him of late.

In the place left vacant by the marriage of Hortense he saw in his dreams at night the phantom of his oldest daughter. He could not help being moved with compassion when thinking of the child he had loved and still did love so passionately, notwithstanding her faults. True love is imperishable, whatever one may do to destroy it. Far from forgetting her, M. Malbrègue had even tried several times to find out the whereabouts of his unfortunate daughter; but all his inquiries had been so far without result.

How would he have acted in case he had found her? No one could say, as he did not know himself. He did not like to admit that he would have received her with open arms, but he felt the irresistible desire of knowing what had become of her and of seeing her once more.

And now by chance, or, rather, we should say, by the agency of Divine Providence, his eyes fell upon an object which belonged to his

daughter. He approaches the window, he stoops, he examines, he thinks he recognizes it; but he must examine it closer.

The general, as we have said, entered the curiosity shop. Not seeing any one to wait on him he impatiently struck the floor with his cane till Jerome Quesnoy, not accustomed to such hurry, came running up to meet him.

"At your service, sir. What can I do for you?" asked the old man, looking over his spectacles at the unexpected customer.

"I would like to see that pitcher you have in the window," answered M. Malbrègue.

Quesnoy, smelling a good bargain, hastened to bring the desired article. He was anxious to get rid of it. Many amateurs had come to bargain for it during the twelve months that it had been in the store, but the antiquarian always refused to come down ever so little in his price.

And be it said, in passing, that it was not through any motive of self-interest that he endeavored to sell the pitcher to the best possible advantage; he had resolved to put aside for the orphan the whole sum which it would realize.

"This is old Sèvres, sir; perfectly authentic and without a blemish," he said, presenting

the pitcher to the old general. The hands of the latter trembled as he took hold of it. He examined it a long time and most minutely.

"It is strange," he said, endeavoring to control his emotion. "Some time ago I had a pitcher exactly resembling this one."

"Indeed!" said old Quesnoy, with marked interest. "And what has become of it, sir? Has it been broken or stolen?"

"Neither the one nor the other; but it is no longer in my possession," answered the general dryly.

He was not accustomed to be questioned.

A silence of short duration followed this answer.

"I am asking myself if it is not the one I hold in my hands," he replied, with some embarrassment. "What do you think? Is it possible to find two pitchers of this kind perfectly identical?"

"No, sir, no; that is not probable," replied the antiquarian, in the tone of one whose opinion is law. "I would even venture to say that it is impossible. This article is very old. I presume it dates from the time of Louis XV.*

* It was under the reign of that prince that porcelain making became centralized at Sèvres, in 1756. In 1695 a certain chemist of Toulon, by the name of Morin, member of the Academy of sciences, had founded a factory of

The subjects are all hand-painted; it is a real work of art. Several pitchers may have been modelled after this pattern, but I do not believe that the paintings of this one could have been reproduced on any other with a similar perfection of details. Are you certain, sir, that the paintings were the same?"

"Quite certain. I have seen them often enough to recognize them at once," replied M. Malbrègue, with a half-suppressed sigh. "Can you tell me how the pitcher came into your hands?"

"Here is the special factory-mark of old Sèvres," continued Jerome, pretending not to have heard the general's question. "It is this double capital letter LL. Do you remember, sir, whether this authentic mark was on your pitcher?"

"Yes, I believe so," said the general, with impatience; "yet I did not care enough about

pottery at St. Cloud. In 1735 two men who had left that factory opened a rival establishment at Chantilly which, after many vicissitudes, was transferred to the Chateau of Vincennes. In 1755 it began to produce splendid pieces of soft paste which became so famous that the work-shops of Vincennes were soon too small and had to be transferred in 1756 to the newly-erected buildings at Sèvres where they remained to the end of the Second Empire; for, strange to say, the factory at Sèvres as well as that of the Gobelins did not suffer during the turbulent times of the Revolution.

it to give it my attention. But please answer my question. How did the pitcher come into your possession?"

His voice was loud, his look haughty; it was easy to see that he was accustomed to command, but he did not succeed on this occasion. Jerome Quesnoy was not the man to be intimidated by the authoritative manners of the old general, and he even became all the more determined to keep the resolution he had taken not to satisfy the curiosity of his unknown customer.

"Ah! I understand," he said, in a tone which almost was bordering on impertinence; "you would like to know how this old Sèvres has become *mine*," he put special stress on that word. "Indeed, this is asking too much of me. I suppose I had to buy it, like a great many other things, from somebody. But that was long ago."

"Do you not remember from whom you bought it?" insisted the general.

"Well, indeed, sir, I should have the memory of an attorney to remember the names of all the persons who come here to sell old porcelain."

"Then you can give me no information whatsoever?"

"No, sir, none at all," replied Quesnoy, bluntly.

M. Malbrègue seemed to be quite vexed, but he remained silent.

"Do you wish to buy the pitcher, sir?" asked Quesnoy.

"Yes, yes," was the quick answer. "What is the price of it?"

"A hundred and fifty francs. Old Sèvres is now very scarce. Buy it or leave it, just as you please."

Quesnoy had purposely raised the price to compensate himself for the expenditure of ill-temper caused by the inquisitive customer. To his great surprise, the latter answered coolly:

"I think it is worth that."

And taking out his pocket-book he paid the cash.

"Send the parcel to my house as soon as possible," he added; "to General Malbrègue, 14 Avenue de Messine."

And without noticing the disappointment of the dealer, he left the store.

Malbrègue! Malbrègue! The very name which was written in the books of the little orphan. No doubt about it, the pitcher had surely belonged to the general. But how

did it come into the possession of the poor widow from whom Quesnoy had bought it at such a low price. Did she steal it, together with the books? No, he would not entertain such a horrible supposition. He still believed the lady to be of noble birth and of perfect honesty, notwithstanding her apparent poverty. Besides, did she not say the pitcher was a family souvenir?

Could there have been some relationship between the mother of Marguerite and M. Malbrègue? What mystery is all this? Who knows? Perhaps if Quesnoy had not been so very prudent and reticent on the matter the general might have claimed the little orphan as belonging to him.

The old man trembled at this thought, and was more pleased than ever with himself for not having answered the insolent questions of the general.

But Quesnoy's peace of conscience was not of long duration.

A year ago he would not have scrupled to conceal by an evasive answer a fact which it was his advantage to keep secret; but the contact with his dear orphan had taught him to consider truth as something sacred.

He had taken the strongest resolution not to

fall back into the habit of giving to self-interest the first place. He had had so much remorse on account of that same pitcher! He felt humiliated when seeing how readily he had yielded to the temptation. By not telling the truth he had again injured his neighbor. Yet Jerome Quesnoy, though confessing his fault, tried to find some extenuating circumstances.

Did not the haughtiness of the general provoke him? Only a saint would have withstood it patiently. Besides, did he not by his silence act in Marguerite's interest?

Assuredly the child was as happy as possible with him and his wife. He knew she would not for the world leave them. Why then expose her to all that trouble?

But in spite of all these justifying reasons the old man felt dissatisfied with himself. One day he was alone at home, Dorothea and Marguerite having gone to see a friend who lived outside the fortifications. Quesnoy was therefore undisturbed in his reflections, and his conscience soon gained the victory. He resolved to reveal to the general the whole truth when bringing him the pitcher, whatever might be the consequence. Mme. Quesnoy returned home somewhat late. Marguerite felt tired

and sleepy, and while both had retired upstairs Quesnoy went out to bring the parcel to the general. On his way thither he prepared the little speech he was going to make to M. Malbrègue; but he might have saved himself that trouble, for when he arrived at the given number of the Avenue de Messine he was told by the servant that the general had gone out to dine.

"I cannot help it," murmured Quesnoy, on leaving, after having recommended to the servant to handle the parcel with the utmost care. "God knows I wanted to tell everything. It is not my fault that he is not at home."

And he thus thought that he had fulfilled his duty.

The night was cold, a piercing north wind was whistling through the leafless trees. Quesnoy buttoned up his overcoat, but the cold blast chilled him to the marrow of his bones. As he went along slowly and with difficulty he had to admit that old age with its attendant infirmities had overtaken him—a reflection which was not calculated to bring cheerfulness to his mind.

On arriving at home his wife, who had been in great anxiety, treated him to a good scolding for not having put on his woollen com-

forter. She gave him a bowl of hot wine to drink in order to prevent the effects of his imprudent exposure. But the harm was done; Quesnoy had taken a heavy cold, which rapidly grew worse.

CHAPTER XI.

DUTY BEFORE PLEASURE.

NEXT day Jerome Quesnoy felt ill, yet he insisted on getting up, and went to the store as usual.

Marguerite also made her appearance shortly after, and began her daily work with the dusting rag. When coming to her favorite spot at the window she suddenly looked around in every direction, and exclaimed in a tone of anxious surprise: "Oh, grandpapa, what has become of my pitcher? I do not see it anywhere."

"No wonder, darling," replied the old man, with a smile. "I have sold it at last."

"Sold it!" said Marguerite, with consternation. "Sold mamma's beautiful pitcher? No, grandpapa, you are not in earnest."

"Why, darling, you knew that the pitcher

was here for sale, did you not? I had purposely placed it there in order to entice some good customer to buy it."

"Yes, I know; but I did not think you would sell it—especially without telling me," stammered the little one, scarcely knowing what she was saying.

Quesnoy had no answer for her.

"So it is gone! I shall never see it, never dust it again!" And she gave free course to her tears and lamentations, as children will do when they are heartbroken.

Marguerite's grief deeply affected M. Quesnoy. He had never seen her weep so bitterly, and he almost thought he was guilty of a monstrous cruelty.

"Come, darling," he said caressingly; "come, console yourself. I did not think you were so unreasonable. See here what I have received for the pitcher!"

Saying this, he opened a drawer of his bureau.

"Seven beautiful gold pieces, and a small one into the bargain! And all for you, Marguerite! I will not keep one cent of it. Is it not better to have the money than to possess an article which you only looked at from time to time?"

But money was of no attraction to a girl of such a passionate temper.

"No, no; I do not want your money; keep it," she screamed frantically. "I wish it was at the bottom of the sea. I prefer my pitcher to all the money in the world."

"Marguerite, you are a naughty girl," said Quesnoy, impatiently; "and, moreover, you are ungrateful, for you know I have acted in your own interest. If you persist in acting so foolishly I cannot keep you in the store; you would frighten away my customers."

It was the first time that Quesnoy thus rebuked Marguerite.

The little girl felt it all the more keenly, and being fully conscious of her foolishness and bad temper, she left the store in tears.

The old man felt almost as bad as the child, and for several reasons; he was physically very ill, then a fixed idea haunted him—he was continually thinking of the pitcher of old Sèvres and of the dissimulation of which he was guilty toward General Malbrègue. Finally, the tears and sighs of Marguerite, who had fled to the kitchen, pierced his heart.

"Poor little darling!" he said to himself; "I have acted so cruelly, so roughly, toward her. Had I known how fondly she was attached to

that vase I would never have sold it. I did not need that miserable sum for my living."

The sighs had died away and there was complete silence in the house. A few moments later Quesnoy heard light footsteps in the corridor, a timid hand slowly opened the door, and in peeped the beautiful face of Marguerite.

"Walk in, darling; walk in," said the antiquarian, with an encouraging gesture; "you need not be afraid."

Marguerite was all confusion; her eyes were cast down, and her trembling hands twisted the lower end of her apron. With a tremulous voice she thus commenced:

"Grandpapa, I have been a very bad child. But I am sorry for it, very sorry. Will you pardon me?"

The old man embraced her tenderly. "Of course I pardon you," he said. "Don't think any more of my scolding. Your grandpapa is too ready to scold, I fear, when things are not going right, like this morning." While he was thus speaking to Marguerite, Quesnoy asked himself if it was not his duty to ask the child's pardon, since he had again wronged her, as he thought.

"Are you perhaps not well, grandpapa?" asked the little girl, in her sweetest tone.

"Well, yes, a little," answered the old man. "My breathing is somewhat embarrassed, but it is nothing serious; it will pass off."

Quesnoy had made great efforts all day to conceal his indisposition, but when evening came he had to confess that he was suffering very much.

Mme. Quesnoy was greatly alarmed on seeing her husband threatened with the same illness which a year ago had brought him to death's door.

"He will have another congestion of the lungs," she said to Marguerite, after having exhausted her little stock of household remedies; "if I only had somebody to send for Dr. Belfonds before night!"

"I am ready to go, grandmamma," said Marguerite. "I know where Dr. Belfonds lives. Grandpapa showed me the house the other day; it is not far from here."

"Would you not be afraid to go, my dear?" asked Mme. Quesnoy. "I do not like to let you go out alone at this late hour."

"No, indeed, I am not afraid," replied Marguerite. "I shall walk fast, and ask the doctor to come as soon as possible."

"I do not know what to say, darling," replied Mme. Quesnoy, fearing both for her hus-

band and for the safety of the child. "If I let you go you promise me to be very careful when crossing the streets?"

"Yes, yes," said Marguerite, running for her hat and coat.

Mme. Quesnoy wrapped a warm woollen shawl around her, kissed her and accompanied her as far as the door.

Marguerite walked, or, rather, ran, so fast that in less than fifteen minutes she arrived breathless at the doctor's house. She rang the bell; a servant came to open the door.

"Is Dr. Belfonds in?" she asked.

"No," was the answer; "but he will not be out long. Will you wait a few minutes?"

The little girl thought she had no other choice; she stepped into the vestibule and took the seat which was offered her by the servant.

The interior of M. Belfond's house captivated the looks of the child; everything was so new, so brilliant, so stylish! The oilcloth under her feet, the stair-carpet with its shining fastenings, the beautiful hall-lamp, everything around her elicited her admiration. But suddenly a still more agreeable sight presented itself to the dazzled eyes of Marguerite. There appeared at the head of the stairs a something

which she was tempted to take for one of those fairy apparitions which Dorothea had so often mentioned in her stories.

It was a young woman dressed in white gauze; several rows of pearls adorned her neck and wrists, and silver flowers were sparkling in her artistically-dressed hair. She came down stairs slowly, but at the unexpected sight of Marguerite she instinctively stood still. The little girl easily recognized the lady who had come one day with M. Belfonds to see grandfather's curiosities, only she seemed to look still more beautiful. Her cheeks were brilliantly colored, her black eyes sparkled like precious stones; a sweet smile enhanced the beauty of her rosy lips.

"What are you doing here, my child?" she asked Marguerite.

"I am waiting for the doctor, madame," said the girl, rising from her seat. "I would like him to come at once to grandfather, who is very ill."

"It will be impossible for him to go there to-night," replied Hortense Belfonds peremptorily. "No need of such hurry; he can wait till to-morrow."

"Oh, no, madame!" exclaimed Marguerite. "We would be so glad if the doctor could

come to-night ; grandfather is really very sick."

"What is your name?" asked the young woman impatiently. "It seems to me I have seen you somewhere."

"I am Marguerite, the grandchild of M. Quesnoy, the bric-a-brac dealer," answered the girl, happy to introduce herself.

"Oh, yes, I remember you now, my darling," said Mme. Belfonds. "So M. Quesnoy is sick again? He seems to be sick quite often."

Marguerite was about to reply when the hall-door opened and the doctor walked in. His first look fell on Hortense, whom he did not expect to find at the door, and he said in a tone of painful surprise: "My dear child, what do you mean? You are not going out to-night, and in such a dress?"

"Well, yes, Gabriel," she replied rather sharply. "Have you forgotten the ball at Mme. d'Obriguy's?"

"No, indeed, Hortense, I did not forget it," replied the doctor calmly, "but I told you this morning that it would be most imprudent for you to go there after having been ill for the last three days. I hoped you would give it up, if for no other reason than to please me."

"You were mistaken, that is all," replied

Hortense coldly. "I do not so easily give up a pleasure to which I have been looking forward for weeks. I have been a little indisposed, it is true, but is it worth while to mention it?"

"H'm!" said the doctor.

"A slight cold, a touch of neuralgia in the side; what a serious affair, indeed! These doctors are the most harassing of husbands; they make a big fuss about nothing. Really, Gabriel, it is enough to make me regret to have married you."

Gabriel Belfonds, who was fondly attached to that charming but frivolous creature, looked sad.

"I beg of you, Hortense, do not speak thus, even though you are only joking," he said most earnestly. "You grieve me very much. If you insist on going, I shall accompany you, but wrap yourself up and use every possible precaution. If we doctors are so tantalizing, as you say, it is because we know what may be the consequence of a cold or an indisposition; this is another way of showing our affection." While saying these last words the doctor turned round to put his hat and overcoat on the rack. He then saw Marguerite standing motionless and looking very grave.

"Who is that little girl, and what does she want?" he asked.

"She is waiting for you," answered his wife, in a low tone, "her grandfather is sick; but I beg of you, do not go there to-night. Go upstairs at once and dress to accompany me to Mme. d'Obriguy's."

"Can I thus neglect my duty?" answered the young doctor reproachingly. "If the case is urgent, I have to go," he added with firmness.

Then turning to Marguerite he asked her:

"What is your grandfather's name, my child?"

"Jerome Quesnoy, sir," she answered.

"What! M. Quesnoy, the bric-a-brac dealer?" exclaimed the doctor in painful surprise. "Sick again? I am very sorry for him. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Pardon, sir, he is very sick," said Marguerite in a solemn tone, "and Mme. Quesnoy would be greatly obliged if you could come without delay."

"I will come at once," answered M. Belfonds. "You may go home, my dear. I shall be at your grandpapa's almost as soon as you will be."

When Hortense entered the dining-room she looked very gloomy.

“Always the same story,” she said angrily; “I can never depend on him; it is really very tedious! What a misfortune to be a doctor’s wife! But I shall go to Mme. d’Obriguy’s to-night. Yes, I shall, though I should have to go alone!”

CHAPTER XII.

MARGUERITE DELIVERS A MESSAGE.

GABRIEL BELFONDS found Quesnoy a great deal worse than he had anticipated from the words of Marguerite; he had a high fever, his breathing was painful and wheezing, pneumonia had set in. The doctor applied prompt and effectual remedies, giving at the same time encouraging words to his patient, for whose recovery, however, he had very little hope.

Like the previous year, Quesnoy was troubled during his long hours of insomnia with many a remorse of conscience, and again he resolved to amend as soon as he recovered.

But, alas, days and weeks passed by and health did not return. On the contrary, serious complications baffled the efforts of medi-

cal aid. M. Belfonds was all attention to his patient; he visited him daily, often twice a day, and used every possible means to procure relief for him. Mme. Quesnoy, however, noticed with apprehensive surprise that the visits of the doctor became shorter and shorter; his manners were totally changed; the former pleasant, open-hearted friend had all at once become grave and taciturn. He walked in, examined his patient, wrote a prescription, and left. It looked as if he purposely avoided to utter a syllable more than was absolutely necessary.

Even little Marguerite noticed the great change in her friend the doctor, and she felt shy in his presence.

Mme. Quesnoy was lost in conjectures as to the reason of this change in the manners of the amiable and kind doctor. The mystery was solved by one of her friends who had come to inquire about the patient. "By the way," she said, "do you know, Mme. Quesnoy, what has happened to Dr. Belfonds? His wife is very sick; there is little hope of saving her life. She took cold at a ball and now she has pneumonia like your husband. How sad for him to lose her? And it is scarcely a year since they were married."

Mme. Quesnoy was no longer surprised at the doctor's gravity and taciturnity; on the contrary, she was deeply touched to see that in the midst of his cruel anxiety, he took time to visit Quesnoy every day. Marguerite also was grieved on hearing the news of Mme. Belfonds' illness. She could not believe that the "pretty lady," as she always called her, was in danger of death. Morning and evening she prayed to God for the recovery of her grandpapa, and now she also added a special prayer for Mme. Belfonds. The day came at last when the doctor looked more like himself again. He walked in with a light and steady step; his face was beaming with happiness. Marguerite, who met him in the passage, was so struck with his joyful appearance that she ventured to speak to him.

"Good-morning, doctor," she said rather timidly, "is Mme. Belfonds better to-day?"

"Yes, thank you, my little darling; she is out of danger, thank God," answered the doctor with a happy smile. "I hope she will soon be quite well again."

"I am happy to hear it," said Marguerite. "And do you think that grandpapa will also be well soon?"

The doctor looked melancholy. "I cannot

say—I hope so,” he replied evasively as he hastened upstairs.

On entering the sick-room Gabriel Belfonds noticed at once a great change in the appearance of the old man. His livid color and his distorted features were indicative of the approaching end. The patient was asleep and the doctor did not wish to have him disturbed. Perhaps he might quietly pass away during this apparently peaceful slumber. The doctor made a sign to Mme. Quesnoy to follow him, and endeavored to prepare her for the worst. The sorrowing woman had the presentiment that her husband would not recover from his present attack; yet when the doctor announced to her that death was imminent, her grief was unspeakable.

The generous and warm-hearted Gabriel showed all the more sympathy for the disconsolate Dorothea as he had been relieved himself a short time ago from a similar painful situation.

Mme. Quesnoy was not, however, unnerved by the news of the misfortune which threatened to befall her; with admirable resignation she forgot herself completely, and only thought of her dying husband. Though heart-broken and oppressed with grief, she was exteriorly

calm and self-possessed at her husband's bedside. Marguerite also had come to the sick-room and seated herself at the opposite side of the bed. Quesnoy was delighted to see her near him.

While they were thus watching him with silent sadness, Jerome Quesnoy opened his eyes and cast a glance first at his wife then at Marguerite.

"Both near me," he stammered with a loving smile; "that is good, I like that."

"You are awake at last, my dear," said his wife, rising at the same time to get some beef-tea.

"The doctor has been here, grandpapa," added Marguerite. "He did not want us to disturb you, you slept so soundly."

"Oh, the doctor has been here; and what did he say?" asked the patient.

Mme. Quesnoy was embarrassed; she had not the heart to repeat what M. Belfonds had said.

The sick man noticed her embarrassment and guessed its cause.

"I know, my dear," he said with a feeble voice, "I know I am dying; I need no doctor to tell it to me. But I have a duty to perform before I die. I must atone for my

evil doings. I have wronged my little darling."

"You wronged Marguerite!" interrupted his wife. "Had she been your own child you could not have done more for her!" The unfortunate woman thought he was raving.

"O grandpapa!" exclaimed the little one, "do not speak thus, I entreat you. You have always been so good to me. You have made me so happy."

The old man caressed the child with his trembling hands.

"I imagined I was good, darling," he replied, "but my affection for you has made me act unjustly and egotistically; I have wronged you, I say it again. And your pitcher of old Sèvres was again the cause of it. Will you render me a service, Marguerite?"

"Oh, yes, grandpapa," she answered unhesitatingly; "I will do anything to please you."

"Well, then, go at once to General Malbrègue; he is the gentleman to whom I have sold the pitcher. He lives at No. 14 Avenue de Messine. Anybody will show you his house when you are in that neighborhood. Give him my regards and ask him as a favor to come to see me as soon as possible. Tell him that I

am very ill, and that I have a most important communication to make to him in regard to the *pitcher of old Sèvres*. You hear? Be quick, darling, don't lose any time, for I feel I have not much time to spare."

Marguerite left at once. It was cold and night was setting in. Most gloomy thoughts saddened her heart as she went along in the direction of the Avenue de Messine. She was to lose her dear grandpapa who had been so good, so kind to her, and she was in all probability on her last errand for him.

The child had no trouble in finding the general's house. A young butcher pointed it out to her. But what was her surprise on seeing that it was the same house before which her poor mother had rested so long on the evening of her death.

Marguerite pulled the bell with violence.

A servant in livery opened hastily and was about to severely scold the little girl for ringing so rudely when his anger was appeased by the sight of a pale-faced and greatly agitated child.

"I would like to speak to General Malbrègue," she said, "but immediately, immediately!"

"Impossible, for he is not in."

"Not in?" replied Marguerite in despair. Oh, what shall I do?"

"I will faithfully give him your message," said the servant, surprised at the agitation of the little creature.

"Oh no, I must see M. Malbrègue myself, I must!" exclaimed the girl. "I have something very important to tell him, and there is no time to lose."

"Then you had better go to Dr. Belfonds'. Probably the general has gone to see his daughter. Do you know where Dr. Belfonds lives?"

"Yes, yes," said Marguerite, bounding out at great speed.

"What can she have to tell the general?" the perplexed servant asked himself as he watched her running down the avenue. A few moments later, Marguerite rang the doctor's bell. Happily the general was there, as the servant had guessed. He was sitting near the crackling fire in Hortense's room when word came that a little girl wanted to see him immediately.

"A little girl!" he exclaimed; "why you are mistaken, Léontine; it must be the doctor she wants to see; you did not hear well."

"No, sir," said the chambermaid, "I thought so myself, but she said distinctly she wished to speak to General Malbrègue. She was sent by M. Quesnoy, the bric-a-brac dealer."

"Oh, I know," said Hortense, who was reclining on a sofa, her head propped up with pillows. "I know the child. She is the loveliest little thing imaginable. Let her come up, dear papa; I would like to see her and chat with her."

"Is that prudent, my daughter?" asked the general. "You will, no doubt, chat with that child and thus fatigue yourself."

"No, papa; I will not fatigue myself. Make her come up; it will be a recreation for me, I am so tired of being confined to this room without any company."

"Very well, dear, have your way," he replied. And he told the chambermaid to let the child come up.

The general was surprised to see a charming little body, dressed plainly but neatly and tastefully, with elegant manners and dignified behavior. Instantly M. Malbrègue's imagination carried him back to those happy years when a black-eyed little girl, the very image of the one now present before him, was the

idol of his house. He gazed at Marguerite in silent astonishment and with feelings of curiosity, admiration, and sympathy.

Marguerite forgot for a moment her pressing message in presence of "the beautiful lady" whose paleness and emaciation gave sufficient evidence of her pitiable state of health.

"Well, my child," said Mme. Belfonds, noticing her surprise, "what has brought you hither to-night?"

"I would like to speak to General Malbrègue," replied the little girl.

"Here I am," said the general, still seated in his arm-chair near the fire. "What have you to tell me?"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite in a quivering tone, "it is grandpapa who sends me. He is very ill. The doctor thinks he will die; but he would like to see you before his death, for he has something very important to tell you."

"And what can your grandfather have to tell me? I do not know him." And the general's tone of voice revealed the displeasure he felt at such a request.

"Oh, pardon, sir, you know him!" replied Marguerite hastily and fearlessly. "You know

my grandpapa, M. Quesnoy, who keeps the store where you some time ago bought a beautiful pitcher of old Sèvres, adorned with most beautiful paintings. It is in regard to that pitcher M. Quesnoy wishes to speak to you."

"Indeed!" said the general, rising as by a magic touch. His emotion was great. Had the antiquarian some important revelation to make concerning that precious vase?

"You will go, will you not, sir?" entreated Marguerite. "Grandpapa is very feeble; he says that if you wait till to-morrow, it will perhaps be too late?"

"I am going instantly," said the general.

"What, papa, you will leave me alone?" expostulated Hortense in the sentimental tone of a spoiled child.

"I regret that I must leave you, dear child; but what can I do?" said M. Malbrègue, leaning over to embrace her.

"Very simple, indeed; do not go," continued the young woman with impetuosity. "Is it worth while to go to so much trouble about an old pitcher?"

"Oh, I entreat you, madame, do not keep the general back!" exclaimed Marguerite, the tears in her eyes. "Grandpapa wishes so ardently to see him before dying!"

"Well, then, to oblige every one, will you stay here with me during my father's absence," asked Hortense, stretching forth her hand to the little girl for whom she felt a most sympathetic attachment. "You will keep me company, and we shall become better acquainted. Well, what do you say?"

Marguerite seemed to be wavering. It was a great sacrifice to stay away from her grandfather, even for one hour, yet was she not in duty bound to do all in her power in order to have his last wish realized?

"I will stay," she said, trying to conceal her heart's sorrow and sadness.

Without heeding the child's grief, Mme. Belfonds rejoiced at her arrangement of affairs, and bade her take off hat and coat and sit at her bedside.

The general kissed his daughter good-by, and in a moment he was out of the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRIC-A-BRAC DEALER TELLS THE SECRET.

“**H**AVE you had supper, Marguerite?” asked Mme. Belfonds when they were alone.

“No, madame, but I do not feel hungry,” answered the child.

The truth was that she had scarcely touched any food that day: she was too sick at heart to eat.

“You will take a cup of coffee with me,” continued the young woman, “it will do you good. Supper will be ready in a few minutes.” A magnificent and most enticing collation was served, but poor Marguerite had no appetite for even the choicest meats which Mme. Belfonds piled on her plate. Her thoughts were with her grandfather, she could not enjoy herself away from him.

“Do you know that I have been very ill since I saw you last?” said Hortense, after a few moments of painful silence.

“Yes, madame, I know,” answered the child. “I was very sorry to hear it, and I prayed to God for your recovery.”

“Really, you prayed for me, little Mar-

guerite!" exclaimed Mme. Belfonds in surprise. "How did you come by that idea?"

"Because I love you; you are so pretty!" said Marguerite innocently.

The young woman smiled and blushed. She was more affected by the sincere compliment of the child than by the flattering adulation of the world; in return she loved her still more sincerely.

"You are much better now," continued Marguerite; "you are no longer in danger of death?"

"In danger of death!" repeated Mme. Belfonds shivering. "Oh, I hope not. What a strange question! My husband assures me I am out of danger and that I am rapidly getting better. For a few days I was very much afraid I would die."

"Why were you afraid?" asked the child with a glance at Mme. Belfonds. "Do you not believe that we shall be very happy in heaven?"

"No, no," she replied with a faltering voice, "who can be certain of ever seeing heaven?"

"Why everybody," said the child, with perfect assurance. "Mamma has often told me that heaven is our true home."

And in confirmation of what she had said,

she recited the beautiful piece of poetry on "heaven" which she had learned from her mother.

"Thank you, my child," said Hortense, "you recite beautifully indeed!"

Then the young woman reclined her head on the pillows, closed her eyes, and remained silent and motionless, so that Marguerite thought she had fallen asleep.

But no, Hortense did not sleep. She was absorbed in serious reflections. For the first time she became conscious of the emptiness of her life. She saw that death was not looked upon with terror by all; to some it appeared like a blissful heaven prepared by the goodness of an omnipotent God.

Marguerite, sitting at the bedside of Mme. Belfonds, found the time very long. Her heart was in that other bed-chamber where old Jerome Quesnoy awaited his last hour. How was he? And what of the general? It seemed to her as if he was never to return.

"I fear you are wearied, Marguerite," said Mme. Belfonds, whom a heavy sigh of the child had awakened from her dreaming meditation. "Poor little girl! I had almost forgotten you, and yet I do love you so dearly. I like so much to have you near me; how happy

I would be if you were my little sister and would stay here with me. Would you not like that?"

Marguerite shook her head. "I prefer to stay with grandpapa," she replied.

She had scarcely uttered these words when big tears filled her eyes at the thought of losing the one she loved most in this world. Hortense noticed her tears and guessed their cause.

"You love your grandfather very much," she said with great kindness. "Did you always live with them?"

"Oh, no!" replied Marguerite. "I have been with M. Quesnoy only one year. He is not my *real* grandfather, you know; I have no parents. I was to be sent to the orphan asylum when M. and Mme. Quesnoy kindly adopted me."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mme. Belfonds. "I was completely ignorant of all this. Tell me all, my dear child, will you?"

Marguerite had not quite finished her short and touching biography when the hall door opened and closed again and the footsteps of men were heard in the vestibule.

"My husband has come home," said Mme. Belfonds, overcome with joy. "He probably

has met my father, for I hear two persons below."

In fact the two gentlemen were coming up at a slow pace and speaking in a mysteriously low tone of voice. Having arrived at the landing they stood still continuing their low conversation without opening the door of Hortense's room.

Hortense wondered what all this meant. At last the general entered. He appeared to be greatly excited.

Marguerite had risen from her seat and tried to leave the room without being noticed, but M. Malbrègue stopped her.

Great was her surprise on seeing in his hand the "Imitation" and the prayer-book of her mother, and presently she was in the embrace of the old soldier who bestowed on her the most tender affection.

Mme. Belfonds was as much surprised as Marguerite; she gazed in turn at her father and her husband as if asking for an explanation. The general spoke first:

"Hortense, this child is my granddaughter," he said with a trembling voice. "Your sister Marguerite was her mother. . . . What M. Quesnoy has told me just now, and the books which I recognize as hers, prove it beyond a

shadow of doubt. My dear daughter is dead. She died in extreme poverty; but she left me this child to be my consolation and my joy."

"It is not true!" exclaimed the child with indignation, as she extricated herself from the arms of the general. "Quesnoy is my grandfather, and I will have no other one, no, I will not. He took me when no one else wanted me; he has taken care of me, he has adopted me. Oh, I entreat you, do not keep me here. He is very sick. I must see him."

"Yes, Marguerite; yes, my child, you will go back to M. Quesnoy," said the doctor with a tone of conciliation; he wishes ardently to see you; my carriage is at the door and will bring you thither in a few moments; the general has purposely come here to be your escort." Saying these words the doctor helped the little girl to put on her hat and coat.

"It may be better," he whispered to M. Malbrègue, as they came down stairs, "not to enter into any explanation of the matter at present. Later on the little girl will be happy to find a new home; for the present—be it said to her credit—she has no affection for any one but her adoptive grandfather."

CHAPTER XIV.

MARGUERITE GOES TO HER NEW HOME.

JEROME QUESNOY slumbered when Marguerite entered the room. She looked at him with great anxiety, his countenance had so much changed since she had left him. Softly she glided up to the head of the bed and affectionately placed her little hand in his. Mme. Quesnoy was sitting at the opposite side of the bed, her hands also clasped the hand of him to whom she had been fondly united for nearly forty years, and who was now on the point of leaving her. She was calm, but her contracted features revealed the grief which pierced her heart.

The presence of the child seemed to revive the dying man. He opened his eyes and looking around he muttered these words: "My little darling—where is my little darling?"

"Here I am, grandpapa, quite near you," said Marguerite, leaning over to embrace him.

Quesnoy looked at her and a last smile brightened up his face, bearing even now the impress of death.

"It is you—yes, it is you," he said almost

inaudibly. Then making a supreme effort he continued:

“Marguerite, my darling, I have told the general all I know concerning the pitcher of old Sèvres; he has recognized your mother’s books. You now belong to him, you are his granddaughter. You will be a good child and do as he will tell you, will you not?”

“I shall try, grandpapa,” answered the child, with a trembling voice.

“Be to him what you have been to me, a good little girl, docile and obedient; be his joy as you have been mine, darling.”

After a severe spell of spasmodic coughing, he continued painfully: “You will not forget my dear wife, darling; and now, Marguerite, I have atoned for my wrongs toward you; say that you forgive me and I shall die in peace.”

“O grandpapa!” sighed Marguerite, scarcely knowing what she was saying, “do not speak thus, I love you so dearly; what can I do to comfort you?”

“Tell me again of—you know, my little angel; tell me again——”

“What shall I tell you, grandpapa?”

“The happy home.”

She guessed his wish and slowly and distinctly began to recite to him:

“Jerusalem, my happy home,
How do I sigh for thee!
When shall my exile have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?”

A smile of peace and happiness was on the lips of the dying man.

“Yes,” he lisped, “Jerusalem, my happy home——”

There was profound silence in the room, interrupted only by the patient's occasional heavy breathing. At last he seemed to feel somewhat relieved and apparently fell into a soft slumber.

Marguerite also was tired out with anxiety and fatigue, and had fallen asleep. It was a full hour before she woke up suddenly and found herself in the arms of General Malbrègue. Poor Dorothea was weeping as though her heart would break.

“Come along with me, dear child,” said the general, pressing her to his bosom.

Marguerite resisted with all her might. “No!” she exclaimed, “I will stay with grand-papa; I cannot, I will not leave him now.”

"My dear child, it is he who has left you," said the general with exceeding gentleness; "his soul is here no more; your old friend has departed without a struggle. Will you not now be *my* grandchild?"

Marguerite gazed fixedly at the white and already rigid face of the dead man. She saw Mme. Quesnoy completely overcome by grief.

Understanding now the real meaning of the general's words, she burst out in tears with all the impetuosity of her ardent and loving nature. The general heartily sympathized with her. When, after a while, he took her by the hand, she made no resistance, and quietly followed him out of the room.

Once more, however, Marguerite asserted her own will, but so prudently that no one could have rebuked her for doing so.

The general having offered to take her to his home, she peremptorily refused to leave Mme. Quesnoy alone in her bereavement. She insisted on staying with her adoptive mother until the remains of Jerome Quesnoy were brought to their last resting place.

The child's presence was a great solace to the afflicted widow. Marguerite's tears and kisses gave greater relief to her aching heart than any human words could have given her.

A new and most harrassing thought came to increase her anxiety. Was not the discovery of the Malbrègue family to deprive her of the child that had now become the very centre of her existence? Happily her apprehensions were not to be of long duration.

After having consulted with his son-in-law General Malbrègue resolved not to separate Marguerite from the generous woman who had adopted and nursed her with maternal tenderness.

He proposed to Mme. Quesnoy to take up her abode at his house as Marguerite's governess and requested her to bestow upon the child her care and affection as in the past. Mme. Quesnoy accepted with the greatest pleasure such a favorable proposition. It was her heart's desire to stay with her beloved child, and to be still longer useful to her. This arrangement was equally agreeable to Marguerite.

The stock of Quesnoy's store was sold; the collection of porcelains of which he had been so proud came under the hammer of the auctioneer, and the widow left forever the little house of the faubourg to occupy the two beautiful rooms of the second story which General de Malbrègue placed at her disposal. Thus

the cruel separation which the old lady had so much dreaded was made considerably less painful to both herself and to Marguerite.

They had scarcely time to become quite accustomed to their new home in the Avenue de Messine when they had to undertake a journey.

Mme. Belfonds' health and strength returned slowly, and her husband wished her to leave the city with its cold and humid atmosphere.

It was decided that the young woman, Marguerite, the general, and Mme. Quesnoy should spend a few months in a more salubrious and agreeable climate. There was no obstacle to the realization of this project, and all would have been happy if the young and genial doctor could have joined the party.

The result proved to be most satisfactory. On their return, at the end of the winter season, the doctor noticed with pleasure a happy change for the better in the health of the whole party. His wife had completely recovered, and there was, besides, another change noticeable in Hortense. She had, during her illness, given herself up to serious reflection; she looked at life in its true light; how then would or could she fall back into her former frivolous carelessness?

The change which had transformed her did not by any means despoil her of her charms; on the contrary, real virtue added new brilliancy to her beauty and enhanced still more her sterling intellectual qualities.

She now fulfills with courage her duties as the wife of a medical man and shares in the privations and anxieties of his profession.

The happiness of their married life is no longer ruffled by petty contrarieties and hasty, imprudent altercations. It is a noble life because they both are treading the path of self-sacrifice, endeavoring to make their own existence useful to others, and that of others better and happier.

Although timid at first in the presence of her grandfather, Marguerite was soon gained over by the kindness and affection which the latter constantly bestowed upon her.

It seemed to him that he had to pay up his old debts, and he wished to do it with heavy interest.

The grief of the general was intense when he heard from the lips of the child the cruel sufferings which his oldest daughter had to endure. The thought of his beautiful Marguerite dying in misery in a filthy garret, a few steps away from his opulent dwelling,

without a word of love and consolation, brought tears to his eyes. He did not doubt but the unfortunate Marguerite had returned to Paris after such a long absence in order to seek her father's pardon and to commend her child to his care.

At the thought of what had passed, General de Malbrègue felt more than grief alone; he felt a remorse of conscience. Was it not his despotic character which had alienated the heart of his unfortunate daughter?

Marguerite's presence in his house was a source of precious consolation. Under the irresistible influence which she exercised around her, the old gentleman has become more amiable, more open-hearted, and his countenance has gained in kindness what it lost in severity and haughtiness. He is intensely fond of his granddaughter, and as she now reciprocates his love, their mutual attachment is growing stronger day by day.

Yet Marguerite will never forget that other grandfather who adopted her when she was poor, unfortunate, and abandoned by all, and who had never faltered in his devotedness to his little darling.

Marguerite often accompanies Mme. Quesnoy when she visits the grave of her husband

in the peaceful cemetery of Père Lachaise, and at each return of spring she may be seen planting forget-me-nots and mignonette around the unpretentious stone which covers the mortal remains of the old bric-a-brac dealer.

Marguerite will also cherish to the end of her life as a most precious relic the pitcher of old Sèvres which has played such an important part in her life's history.

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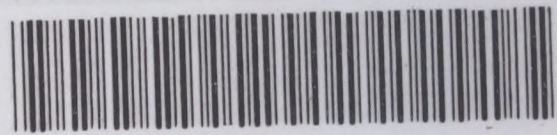
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